

# S P E C T A T O R

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## Where are Pictures Heading?

Million-Dollar Productions Have Become So  
Common They Set a Pace Difficult For  
Producers to Maintain With  
Assurance of Profit

### THE NEW YORK SPECTACLE

... REVIEWED ...

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# Barge Right In!

- • The next Spectator will be the Birthday Party Number.
- • It is a regular Hollywood party—not limited to invited guests.
- • Anyone who can pay the cover charge of Thirty-five Dollars can get a place at one of the tables — a quarter-page space.
- • SO BARGE RIGHT IN!
- • And a lot of you fellows who have said we would hear from you had better hurry up.
- • It's a painless procedure. Just telephone GLadstone 5213 and reserve a space. By and by you will get a bill and byer and byer we will get the money.
- • And the incident will be closed.



From the

# Editor's Easy Chair



## WHERE ARE MOTION PICTURES HEADING?

**M**ETRO spends upward of two million dollars in making its *Ziegfeld* spectacle. It is the most gorgeous production ever brought to the screen. Over in England Alex Korda makes *Things to Come*, the first British picture to cost over one million dollars. For technical wizardry it is said to surpass anything done in a Hollywood studio. Warners have given us *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a great achievement. From the same studio came the screen's finest biography, *Pasteur*, and perhaps the best photographed play, *Petrified Forest*. Metro's *Mutiny on the Bounty*, Dave Selznick's production of *Tale of Two Cities*, Warners' *Captain Blood*, and other big things on the way prompt Red Kann to remark in *Motion Picture Daily*, "One of the better manufacturers of celluloid ironically talks about anything costing less (than \$1,000,000) as a trailer."

All of which suggests the question: Where is the film industry heading? It has adopted the policy of making pictures out of money instead of out of human emotions. It has trained its audience to look for a million dollars on the screen of every picture house, and the only way it can hold its audience is to keep on spending more money as long as it is making the kind of pictures it is making now.

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As a matter of fact, though, producers have forgotten their audience and are conducting a battle of millions of dollars among themselves. They are trying to outdo one another, each is trying to top the other fellow's biggest production. But has the top not been attained already? Can we expect a more elaborate spectacle than *Ziegfeld*? A greater phantasy than *Dream*? A more impressive technical feat than the Korda picture? A grander sea epic than *Bounty*?

More millions of dollars might accomplish such things, but where are the millions to come from? "One segment of substantial Hollywood opinion," writes Kann, "thinks it sees the answer in a general hike in admissions." But today's pictures are not supporting today's admission prices. One feature filled film theatres yesterday; two features fail to fill them today. Here are some of the specimen double bills: *Show Them No Mercy*, *Metropolitan*; *Magnificent Obsession* (a \$1,000,000 production), *You May Be Next*; *Story of Louis Pasteur*, *Don't Get Personal*; *It Had to Happen*, *Tough Guy*; *The Lady Consents*, *Three Live Ghosts*; *Another Face*, *Red Salute*.

And such fare is not enough to draw audiences. Writes Chester B. Bahn, cinema critic of the Syracuse, N. Y., *Herald*: "The cinema, both as an art and a business, seems to be fast approaching a crossroads. Artistically, it is nearing the day when it must decide whether it shall

continue the present 'mass production' course, with its attendant evils, or whether it shall abruptly about face and drastically restrict its product to pictures which can stand unsupported by 'second features,' give-aways, bank nights and kindred devices. Commercially, it cannot much longer ignore the fact that its competitive practices, especially in the field of exhibition, are ruinous, that showmanship today is largely a matter of 'promoting,' and that instead of selling films, it is merchandising crockery, plated ware, screeno and a dozen other box-office stimulii."

And from across the Atlantic come indications that screen commentators over there are wondering about the future of pictures. Herbert Thompson, the discerning editor of *Film Weekly* (London), concludes an article on the Korda epic with: "I should admire him still more if he would now descend from the Olympian heights and clinch his film producing genius by making a simple, down-to-earth emotional drama of real human beings, preferably against an everyday English background."

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Editor Thompson's advice to Korda is my advice to Hollywood producers. As they have gone as far as they can from the first principles of screen entertainment, they should return to them, and instead of trying to stupefy audiences with the magnitude of their productions they should strive to entertain them with the power of the emotional appeal of more simple pictures. It is not the million dollars spent on it which makes a picture satisfy an audience. It derives its box-office value from its emotion-producing content, an element wholly unrelated to money.

To go back to Critic Bahn. In his faraway listening post he has caught the sound of a Hollywood plaint. "That there is a direct relationship between the double feature evil and the 'cheap' production policy observed by the studios, is fairly obvious," he writes. "That pictures budgeted at from \$100,000 to \$200,000 cannot have the same care as those costing five times as much is likewise. And one does not need to be a Daniel or a Solomon to comprehend that a \$200,000 picture cannot successfully compete with a million dollar 'epic' or even one costing half as much."

The \$100,000 picture fails to entertain its audience sufficiently to need no mate on the program with it, not because it "cannot have the same care as those costing five times as much," but because it does not have the same care. Double features, bank nights, general merchandizing, stage shows, were made necessary by the fact that studio attention gradually drew away from the many cheaper pictures and centered itself on the few whose

costs have mounted until the million-dollar picture which startled us yesterday makes us yawn today.

The film industry is feeling sorry for itself, but it is suffering no ill for which it, itself, is not responsible. It never has tried to understand its medium. It is not aware that it was the simplicity of its expression which made the motion picture the greatest entertainment force the world has ever known, its power to appeal in the simplest terms to the emotions of mankind, its ability to express itself clearly in the elemental language of pictorial symbols. Made possible only by modern technical and mechanical discoveries, its pure form still remains the most primitive method of telling a story. The earliest known records of man's mental product are chiseled pictures on ancient cliffs, immovable pictures which tell stories of their day. In telling its stories, the screen merely makes its pictures move.

Hollywood has at its command a definite art medium and is as ignorant of its fundamentals as it is of the language of some remote African tribe. It grew great on the receipts from one business, and then, when given the sound camera, went into an entirely new business. It offers the public everything except its most marketable commodity, pure cinema. Photographed plays, overwhelming productions, big names make up its fare, and it seriously is considering tarnishing the purity of its art with smears of color.

Although it controls the only market for talent, it bids up prices and pays hundreds of thousands yearly to each of a group of people who could not sell their services elsewhere if Hollywood refused to pay so much for them. The market prices of talent have been created by the film industry itself by the manner of its exploitation, and it is groaning under the burden of it. It refuses to consider an original story it could buy for a farthing and pays a pound for a play with less pictures possibilities.

And it thinks exhibitors should increase admission prices because the cost of production is so high!

The greatest folly the industry ever committed was to put on airs and take itself out of the twenty-five cent entertainment class. If that were all anyone were asked to pay to see any picture, pictures of necessity would be made more sanely and both exhibitors and producers would be more prosperous.

But things that have been and things that are, are not matters of first importance now. The thing that counts is, what is going to happen? How can the industry change its course? It cannot pursue its present practice of piling cost on cost, and it cannot pass its extravagances on to its customers, for its salesmen, the exhibitors, have to give things away to tempt the public to buy its product at the present prices. To see a picture I wished to review I went to a theatre and won an electric coffee percolator, and a very good one, too, but I envied the man behind me who won a washing machine.

A considerable percentage of the industry's revenue is derived from people who do not go to theatres to view the industry's expensively made pictures. The chances of winning large sums of money or valuable objects of trade are offered as bribes to tempt patronage. It is a sorry state of affairs.

Time was when simply made pictures maintained all branches of the film industry at an even level of prosperity. It was not the manner in which they were made, however, which gave them their box-office value. What, then, was responsible for the film industry's prosperity in the first place? Is it possible to restore that prosperity?

It seems reasonable to assume that the kind of product which created the prosperity would be able to recreate it. It cannot be argued that a form of entertainment so sound fundamentally that it wrote the most spectacular page in the history of industrial development, could become in less than ten years a commercial commodity which the public no longer would buy.

The motion pictures which built the industry had but one handicap: they were unable to express themselves in sound when sound would have added to their entertainment value or expedited the pace of the stories they told. Superimposed titles were used on screens to acquaint the audience with the drift of silent dialogue. It would have been better if it had been possible to make audible the words the titles contained. Continuous musical accompaniments were a necessary part of screen entertainment. It could not be supplied at the source and the showing of the pictures often was harmed by the manner of its application at the outlet. It would have been well if producers had been able to make appropriate scores a part of their product to assure uniform showing during the entire life of a film.

It was a form of entertainment which appealed directly to the imagination, which presented nothing but unrealities which audiences had to imagine were real, which evoked purely emotional response. It was unique in that while it was basically intellectual entertainment, really animated visual literature, the cooperation of the intellect was not necessary to its enjoyment. We just sat back and viewed it, interpreted the fleeting pictures in such terms as pleased our imaginations most, had mental rest and a thoroughly good time.

In those days it did not matter what pictures we saw. We used them merely as material out of which our imaginations manufactured entertainment to please our individual fancies. We did not shop for pictures. We went so many nights a week, no matter what was showing. That kept the film industry's prosperity steady.

Then came sound. It gave the industry the opportunity to improve the quality of its product by making audible the spoken titles and providing synchronized scores at the source, an opportunity to make greater the already great entertainment which had made Hollywood a thriving community by its command of a worldwide market.

But Hollywood producers promptly went out of the business that made them prosperous and headed up a false trail which they have been following ever since. They shattered the restful quiet of picture houses by talking their stories instead of photographing them. They dismissed imagination and made their product purely intellectual. They did not credit us with knowing when we saw steam issuing from a whistle there must be an accompanying noise. They shattered our nerves with the noise itself and with every other noise they could pick up anywhere. *They put into pictures everything whose ab-*

sence from them had given the screen its worldwide popularity. They destroyed the foreign market.

The novelty of sound ran picture attendance up to 120,000,000 paid admissions weekly in this country alone. When the novelty wore off attendance dropped to 70,000,000 weekly. To stimulate it Hollywood went dirty, produced pictures which were a disgrace to it and an insult to the public. Then the League of Decency saved the film industry's life by forcing it against its will to be decent. It still is chafing under the restraint of the enforced respectability which checked the downward curve of its box-office receipts.

Now with the magnitude of its productions, the millions of dollars it spreads upon the screen, the industry is endeavoring to stun the public into patronizing film theatres in greater numbers. But the novelty of dollars is wearing off as steadily as the novelty of sound wore off. Hollywood thinks it is prosperous because it is making two pictures to earn the box-office returns one picture used to earn. Exhibitors, however, are not prospering. They are holding the thorny end of the stick.

\* \* \*

I am not anticipating a calamity. The art of the screen has inherent strength to assert itself no matter what degree of punishment is accorded it. But I would like to see the picture industry come to its senses, return to its real business, cease thinking it can make screen entertainment out of dollars only, restore in the public the habit of going to pictures and put an end to its shopping for them.

It would be easy to do all this. It can be done by allowing the screen to talk its own language, by permitting the camera to resume its position as the story-telling medium and using the sound device as an incidental aid. Hollywood will have to come to it. Money cannot continue to entertain audiences. But motion pictures always will, dramas and comedies which give us more to look at and less to listen to. That is the kind of entertainment that built the industry and it is the only kind that will support it permanently.

Wills-o-the-wisp are all right to chase when all we are looking for is exercise, but poor things in which to place hope of substantial reward.

With its next issue the SPECTATOR will celebrate its tenth birthday. The birthday itself falls on March 29 as it was on that day in 1926 the paper made its first appearance. The SPECTATOR is taking advantage of its anniversary to prey on those who wish it well and feel it serves a useful purpose. To make the preying gentle it is asking no one to take a larger space than one-quarter page of advertising space. It never has believed greatly in the value of the kind of advertising the screen personnel is asked to do in Hollywood film papers, and has made but few appeals for that sort of support, but advertising is a paper's only source of substantial revenue, and the SPECTATOR shares with all other businesses an inability to get along without revenue. But its wants are not great and it hopes its demands are modest. In my prowling around I have encountered quite a number of people who said we would hear from them. I wish they, and all others who intend to come in but who have put it off, would phone the office and give their names to the pleasant voiced girl who answers. The price for

a quarter-page—no more to anyone—is thirty-five dollars, payable after publication. There is more to it than merely the financial angle. Every order for space cheers us by letting us know there is another person who approves the SPECTATOR's course and wishes it well. For ten years it has been blundering along, striving to be of some use to motion pictures and is human enough to appreciate thoroughly a friendly pat on the back.

\* \* \*

Having entrusted to John, the smilingly efficient head waiter at the Beverly Brown Derby, the selection of the dishes that were to constitute my dinner, I surveyed my surroundings and translated what I saw into terms of motion pictures. Nowhere in this country or abroad have I found better cooking, more appetizing food, than that which has made famous the three restaurants so ably conducted by Bob Cobb. While attractive enough, the Brown Derbies put on no airs in the way of furnishings. The booths are constructed of ordinary wood, the floors are of concrete and there are no architectural adornments, no drapes, and, except in the case of the Vine Street Derby where cartoons are hung, the walls are bare. But I inquired and discovered that the seats in the booths are covered with the finest, most expensive upholstery. Thus what the customer sits on is the best procurable. The business of the Brown Derbies is to sell food and please its customers, consequently the quality of the food and the comfort of the customers receive first consideration. The business of the motion picture industry is to sell emotions, but emotions are not given the first consideration of producers. They go in for trimmings, which the Brown Derbies ignore. Big names, overwhelming productions, unlivable interiors are used to adorn the emotions and distract our attention from them. Bob Cobb can teach producers a valuable lesson in the commercial wisdom of giving first consideration to the reduction of their chief commodity to terms of greatest simplicity.

\* \* \*

On some of the lots "Keep off" signs are displayed on sets dressed with expensive furniture. Players have nothing to sit on between scenes although there are plenty of upholstered chairs and divans scattered around. On the Warner lot the other day I noted covers thrown over such furniture and players enjoying the comfort thus provided for them. Not a bad idea for all the lots to adopt.

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British editors who read the SPECTATOR might pass it on to their readers that whenever a newsreel presents a picture of Britain's new king, American audiences applaud him warmly. At least I have found it the case with every audience of which I have been a member.

\* \* \*

I have seen enough pictures Bryan Foy has made for Warner Brothers to convince me that as a producer he has a great deal on the ball. He will go down in the screen's hall of fame as the maker of the first all-talkie, and he is still going strong.

\* \* \*

Again I plead with someone, anyone, to tell me what a shot of Lowell Thomas adds to a Movietone newsreel. He has a nice face but it is getting on my nerves.

\* \* \*

I am not sure who is going to play Mary Beaton in *Mary of Scotland*, but she better be good!

# Looking at the Latest

## *Rather a Shirley Rhapsody*

CAPTAIN JANUARY, Twentieth Century-Fox. Directed by David Butler; associate producer, B. G. DeSylva; screen play, Sam Hellman, Gladys Lehman, Harry Tugend; based on a story by Laura E. Richards; photography, John Seitz, A.S.C.; art direction, William Darling; settings by Thomas Little; assistant director, Ad Schaumer; film editor, Irene Morra; costumes, Gwen Wakeling; musical direction, Louis Silvers. Cast: Shirley Temple, Guy Kibbee, Slim Summerville, Buddy Ebsen, Sara Haden, Jane Darwell, June Lang, Jerry Tucker, Nella Walker, George Irving, James Farley, Si Jenks.

WHATEVER your interest in motion pictures, whether you seek them out as passing entertainment or view them as an interesting study, and particularly if you are working in them or preparing yourself for a career in them, take advantage of the first opportunity to view *Captain January*. In it you will see the world's greatest actress, the screen's greatest player, in a performance surpassing any other I have seen in a motion picture.

I have been watching myself since a Cleveland, Ohio, paper made a good-natured reference to the freedom I give my enthusiasm when reviewing a picture I like. Perhaps I get too enthusiastic. But can one get too enthusiastic about Shirley Temple? Can anyone challenge the statement that she is the screen's greatest individual gift to the public? Can anyone name another actress who can give a better performance? She is a beautiful child, but her beauty is her least important attribute. There are millions of beautiful children, but among them only one Shirley Temple has been discovered.

The SPECTATOR always has contended the screen is not an acting art, using the word "acting" in the sense of something that can be perfected by training. Training perfects one in the *simulation* of emotions, but the perfect screen actor is he who *feels* the emotions and gives no thought to their technical expression. Shirley Temple is too young to have learned technique. She was born with power to become the person she plays, to feel the mood of every scene she plays, consequently each of her performances is flawless.

In *Captain January* she runs the full gamut of emotions. She is grave, gay, impish, tender, tragic; she overplays no scene because her absorption in her role is so complete that her reaction to every situation is natural. In her fine eyes every emotion is registered so vividly its honesty cannot be challenged. It is not acting. It is feeling. We do not see her eyes in the greatest moment of her performance, one of the greatest brief moments the screen has to its credit. She has been separated from the old lighthouse keeper who rescued her from the sea and kept her to himself, and when she finds him again her voice betrays the poignancy of her joy. "Oh, Captain!" is all she says as she flies into his arms, her voice choked with emotion so genuine that the scene is thrilling.

In contrast with this scene we have one in which Shirley, Guy Kibbee and Slim Summerville burlesque the sextette from *Lucia de Lammermoor*, comedy as delicious as any the screen has given us. Then she has her tender

moment when she sings to Kibbee as he is putting her to bed, a sweet little song sung sweetly, lovingly, her eyes and voice as tender as the words. And with Buddy Ebsen she dances with joyous abandon and a true sense of rhythm. Truly, an extraordinary child.

While the big studios are trying to outdo one another with the magnitude of their productions and the number of millions they spend on each, Twentieth-Century digs up this little hokum story of heartbeats, puts the screen's greatest box-office star in it, and it will sweep the world.

In the final analysis, of course, the main credit for a good picture must go to the man who directed it. Dave Butler is to be praised for his skill in impressing upon Shirley the significance of each scene, and then allowing her to express it in her own way. Such a great performance could be the response only to understanding and expert direction. I do not agree with Dave's conception of the character played by Sara Haden. I thought her too harsh, too unrelenting, a harking back to old melodrama days when roles were portrayed with bold strokes.

Guy Kibbee and Slim Summerville never gave better performances. Buddy Ebsen some day is going to be a notable screen comedian. As a dancer he already is a headliner, but his real box-office value ultimately will be as a comedian. June Lang is an ingratiating miss who should be in demand for romantic roles. Jane Darwell's performance is competent.

The picture was given a production of pictorial attractiveness and considerable sweep, William Darling's art direction having much to do with setting the mood of the picture. John Seitz's camera does full justice to it.

The combination of Buddy de Sylva, producer, and Dave Butler, director, brought good results. The picture is one you cannot afford to miss.

## *Much to Britain's Credit*

RHODES, THE EMPIRE BUILDER, Gaumont British. Directed by Berthold Viertel; from the book by Sarah Gertrude Millin; South Africa exteriors directed by Geoffrey Barkas; adaptation, Leslie Arliss, Michael Barringer; photography, Bernard Knowles; art director, A. Werndorff. Cast: Walter Huston, Oscar Homolka, Basil Sydney, Frank Cellier, Peggy Ashcroft, Renee DeVaux, Bernard Lee, Lewis Casson, Ndanisa Kumalo of Matabeleland.

THIS is a picture all Hollywood should see. Gaumont-British has sent us one, now showing at the Four-Star Theatre, that for technical excellence has not been surpassed by anything we have made here. In all its externals *Rhodes, Empire Builder* is a masterful job which brings home to us the threat of British competition that Hollywood will have to extend itself to meet. Except in the case of a couple of opening scenes, the photography is comparable with the best our cameras bring to the screen. Both exteriors and interiors are of arresting artistic photographic beauty.

The story is straight biography without any romance to make it comply with the Hollywood conviction that without love it is not a motion picture. Cecil Rhodes is a

glamorous figure in the development of Britain's South African empire, and the film sticks closely to its business of showing the reason for the glamour. The production is one of great sweep, the camera supplying graphic shots of the African veldt. Interiors are in keeping with the lives of the pioneers, both native and British, no effort being made to provide sets of imposing pictorial impressiveness on their own account.

We are introduced to a new screen player, Oscar Homolka, an actor of superior ability whose performance never has been surpassed by that of any Hollywood star. His Paul Kruger is a cinematic masterpiece which our actors can study to their advantage. Walter Huston is our contribution to the cast, his American reputation no doubt being the reason for his selection. He does not seem to be altogether easy in his part, giving what impresses me as being his most unconvincing screen characterization. It would have been wiser to have had an Englishman play the role.

Basil Sydney, Frank Cellier, Peggy Ashcroft and Renee DeVaux give beautiful performances.

Berthold Viertel, one of the several directors who came from abroad to Hollywood and had to go back again in search of opportunities to demonstrate their ability, gives the picture outstanding direction, the even quality of the performances being greatly to his credit.

*Rhodes* is one of England's important pictures and reflects the rapid advance English producers are making in overcoming Hollywood's lead in the world's market. Time spent in its study will prove profitable to those who make our pictures. It is one of those rare pictures the most caustic critic will have to record as flawless. And for students of history it is a document of great value.

### *Somewhat Ponderous*

THE ROBIN HOOD OF EL DORADO, Metro release of John W. Considine, Jr., production. Stars Warner Baxter; features Ann Loring, Bruce Cabot, Margo and J. Carrol Naish; directed by William A. Wellman; screen play by William A. Wellman, Joseph Calleia, Melvin Levy; from book by Walter Noble Burns; musical score by Herbert Stothart; art directors, David Townsend, Gabriel Scognamillo; photographed by Chester Lyons; assistant director, Tom Andre. Supporting cast: Soledad Jimenez, Carlos de Valdez, Eric Linden, Edgar Kennedy, Charles Trowbridge, Harvey Stephens, Ralph Remley, George Regas, Francis McDonald, Kay Hughes, Paul Hurst, Booth Howard, Harry Woods.

THE exploits which wrote the name of Joaquin Murrieta into the history of California were inspired by motives of revenge. Revenge is listed among the unworthy impulses, among the ones we should not indulge. The moral tone of a screen story cannot rise above the source of its inspiration. Revenge cannot be justified by the fact of the establishment of what inspired it. Murrieta was a bandit, one who took the law into his own hands, preyed alike on the honest and dishonest and lived off the spoils of his plundering. His actions had no significance beyond the territory in which he operated, did not change the history of the state, had only a momentary effect on the social aspect of early California.

It would seem that Murrieta was an unfortunate choice as a hero for a motion picture story. *Robin Hood of Eldorado* is a ponderous production which strives mightily to justify his pillaging, but he remains through-

out just a bandit whose only motive is revenge. He benefited no one outside the band of his cutthroat followers. The title of the picture is a slur on the memory of the original Robin Hood who plundered joyously for the benefit of others, who took from people who had, to give to people who had not.

Metro has given the picture a production of sweep and vigor, making it a great outdoor epic in which the camera plays the leading part, but it remains an unsatisfactory piece of screen entertainment. There are competent performances by Warner Baxter, Ann Loring, Margo, J. Carrol Naish, Soledad Jimenez, Carlos de Valdez and Paul Hurst, every one of whom dies during the progress of the picture, all but one of violence. The flogging scene which shocked viewers of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, is duplicated here with even more brutality. It is a superfluous addition to the accumulation of incidents which influence Murrieta in embarking upon his career of banditry.

It is the theme of the story, not its fabrication into a motion picture, which is the weakness of the production as screen entertainment. Everyone who had a part in its making is entitled to credit. Baxter's performance is thoughtful and compelling, ranking well up among the best things he has done. Naish presents a brilliant characterization of a joyously fiendish outlaw whose only excuse for killing Chinamen is that he does not like them. Ann Loring, with enough beauty to adorn any picture, displays talent enough to gain the favor of audiences. Bruce Cabot, the only principal who is alive when the picture ends, is his usual competent self.

Bill Wellman's direction is satisfactory. He is credited also with writing the screen play in collaboration with Joseph Calleia and Melvin Levy. Chester Lyons contributes businesslike photography. Apparently he was not encouraged to do full justice to the pictorial possibilities of some of the striking scenes.

In spots throughout the film music is used as a background. I must run out to the Metro lot and ask John W. Considine, Jr., producer of the picture, what prompted him in the selection of scenes to be given musical treatment. As I have written a thousand times, all motion pictures should have continuous scores, and when I find music used only in spots I am puzzled when I endeavor to figure why this scene is one of the spots and that one is not. I'll have to ask Johnnie. I don't think he knows, but I'll ask him.

### *It Takes Your Breath Away*

MURDER BY AN ARISTOCRAT, First National. Directed by Frank McDonald; screen play by Luci Ward, Roy Chanslor; story by Mignon G. Eberhart; photography by Arthur Todd; assistant director, Wilbur McLaugh; film editor, Louis Hasse; art director, Hugh Reticker; supervisor, Bryan Foy. Cast: Lyle Talbot, Marguerite Churchill, Claire Dodd, Virginia Brissac, William Davidson, John Eldredge, Gordon Elliott, Joseph Crehan, Florence Fair, Stuart Holmes, Lottie Williams, Mary Treen, Milton Kibbee, Henry Otho.

SEE this one, even if you do not care for murder mysteries. It moves so fast all your faculties are employed in merely keeping up with it and you have no time to ask yourself if you are enjoying it. It may be that Frank McDonald in his direction of this picture has hit upon the correct formula for murder mystery films. As I

sit in my garden this morning and run over on my mental screen *Murder By An Aristocrat*, which I saw last night, I discover a few things in it that I do not think should be there. But the thing that matters is that I had no time to discover them last night. When you are watching a buzz saw turn you cannot detect a flaw in one of its teeth, and after the sawing job is done the possible existence of a flaw is unimportant. The trouble with most of the pictures of the sort is that they give us time to think.

This Warner contribution to the cycle is no tightwad. It gives us three corpses. It consists largely of the entire cast chasing up and down stairs in breathless determination to locate the source of origin of blood-curdling screams, and three times, by way of an extra dividend, there is a corpse to justify the strenuous exertion. It really is splendid entertainment if your nerves are unshatterable. And if you like to dream, see the picture before going to bed and you will dream about it all night.

Until the very end, when Marguerite Churchill, one of the screen's most attractive and talented girls whom I was pleased to see again, solves the problem by reconstructing the crimes, you will not have the slightest suspicion of the identity of the guilty party. I do not know how under the sun Marguerite gained her knowledge of the incidents, but I did not think of that until this morning, consequently it did not lessen my enjoyment last night.

Frank McDonald deserves great credit for his direction. He demonstrates the value of movement to screen entertainment, the wisdom of headlong speed to hold the attention of the audience. He gives us a *motion* picture, made possible by the exceedingly busy screen play of Luci Ward and Roy Chanslor. And to Louis Hasse for his expert cutting there is due a special award of merit. To give the members of the cast the credit due them would be merely a repetition of the names you will find above.

*Murder By An Aristocrat* is another of the good production jobs being done by Bryan Foy. His contributions to the Warner program must be glad news to exhibitors.

### *Jolson in a Jolly One*

THE SINGING KID, a First National picture. Directed by William Keighley; numbers staged by Bobby Connolly; screen play by Warren Duff, Pat C. Flick; story by Robert Lord; music and lyrics by E. Y. Harburg, Harold Arlen; assistant director, Chuck Hansen; supervisor, Robert Lord; photography by George Barnes; film editor, Tom Richards; art director, Carl Weyl; gowns by Orry-Kelly; orchestral arrangements by Ray Heindorf; orchestra conducted by Leo F. Forbstein. Cast: Al Jolson, Sybil Jason, Edward Everett Horton, Lyle Talbot, Allen Jenkins, Beverly Roberts, Claire Dodd, Jack Durant, Frank Mitchell, Joseph King, Wm. Davidson, Winifred Shaw, The Yacht Club Boys, Cab Calloway and His Band.

THE brisk pace it maintains, the quick succession of entertaining scenes, lively and tuneful musical numbers, a connected story interesting enough to hold attention, and wide enough in scope to embrace the back-stage glitter of New York and the sleepy quiet of rural New England, the best performance Al Jolson has given the screen, clever supporting performances by Edward Everett Horton, Allen Jenkins and others—just some of the things making *The Singing Kid* one of the best bits of entertainment of the sort I ever saw.

It gains strength from what it lacks quite as much as from what it has. It shows us no imposing dance routines

with girls' legs being used to work out mathematical problems, and is not loaded down with the numerous distractions which have become standard ingredients of back-stage musicals. The slim story is woven cleverly through the various musical interludes, showing itself just often enough to keep us from forgetting it entirely.

The picture starts its lively pace with a quick succession of shots showing Jolson in roles that made him famous, singing bits from songs which he made famous. It glides into a sequence which ranks among the cleverest contributions to musical pictures. Jolson tries to sing his Mammy song, and the Yacht Club Boys, in the highly entertaining manner in which they do things, implore him in song not to sing it. Al tries to escape them, but they follow him from the theatre, through street traffic; crowds join in, and finally the whole populace engages in a dance which ends with prostration and collapse of everybody on the pavement. The crowded theatre rewarded the sequence with a generous outburst of enthusiastic applause.

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But that is only one of the numerous features which make the production outstanding. There are too many for enumeration in this review. *The Singing Kid*, in short, is a picture you should see if you are looking for clean, decent, clever and lively entertainment which does not endeavor to interest you in the working out of domestic and social problems. The picture was designed to amuse you, and you will find it achieves its purpose.

In this picture Al Jolson does not work as hard as has been his habit, and the result is he gives his most impressive performance he has to his credit on the screen. Of course, he cannot cease being Al Jolson, unquestionably the world's greatest individual entertainer, but it is the Jolson's way of doing things that gives the picture its strength.

Horton is always capable. In all the hundreds of his performances on the screen I cannot remember one that was not pleasing. Jenkins plays a dumb part effectively. It requires real brains to enact a brainless character so capably. William Davidson and Lyle Talbot also do well.

That charming child, Sybil Jason, is running Shirley Temple a good second in capturing the heart of the world. Her appealing performance contributes greatly to the picture. Warner Brothers present to us a real find in the person of Beverly Roberts, an English girl who soon will command a large following. She is admirable in a romantic role. Claire Dodd makes effective her role as Jolson's unfaithful sweetheart.

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Robert Lord's story and the screen play by Warren Duff and Pat C. Flick provide excellent material for William Keighley's expert direction. It is one of the smoothest bits of direction I have seen recently. A word of praise must go to Tom Richards for the capable manner in which the film is edited, and to George Barnes for a splendid photographic job.

*The Singing Kid* is just another of the outstanding pictures which Warner Brothers are in the habit of turning out. Hal Wallis, the Warner production chief, certainly is making a record for notable achievements.



## Produced by Sol Lesser

O'MALLEY OF THE MOUNTED, produced by Sol Lesser for Twentieth Century-Fox release. Directed by David Howard; from the story by William S. Hart; screen play by Dan Jarrett, Frank Howard Clark; production manager, Edward Gross; photography, Frank B. Good, A.S.C.; art direction, Lewis J. Rachmil; assistant director, George Sherman; film editor, Arthur Hilton; sound, Hal Bumbaugh; technical advisor, Dave Mason. Cast: George O'Brien, Irene Ware, Stanley Fields, James Bush, Victor Potel, Reginald Barlow, Dick Cramer, Tom London, Charles King, Olin Francis, Crauford Kent.

BILL HART's story had enough meat in it to give Sol Lesser a chance to turn out a lively outdoor drama that will prove satisfactory to the formidable army of George O'Brien fans, one of whom I happen to be myself. George stands for the clean, clear-thinking, healthy young Americans I like to see on the screen, and all his pictures take us away from city turmoil and lead us through the well ventilated art galleries in which Nature displays its sculptures and its great landscapes which use the horizon as a frame. The cloying hand of the microphone has been laid less roughly on the outdoor pictures than on any others; scenery is an important part of them and only the camera can bring it to us.

In *O'Malley of the Mounted* there is a great deal of the wide outdoors, admirably photographed by Frank B. Good. The story is one of the smart fellows of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police being baffled by a motley gang of our outlaw fellows, led by Stanley Fields, until George, one of the Mounted, is given the chore of wiping them out. He does, and in the process accumulates sergeant's stripes and a bride in the person of Irene Ware.

\* \* \*

Right up to the final fade-out Sol Lesser deludes us into thinking we are viewing a motion picture, and then, by neglecting to attach to it the identifying tag of a huge close-up of a kiss, makes us wonder just what the thing really is. George and Irene ride on a buckboard into the fade-out and toward a place to be married, and never once have we seen them enjoying even the degree of passion that can be engendered by holding hands. Someone should speak to Sol about his recklessness in thus shattering one of the sacred traditions of Hollywood screen productions.

The story is told expertly. In writing the screen play Dan Jarrett and Frank Howard Clark have ignored non-essentials. Two men break jail. In their cell a file is displayed. There is a scene in which one of the men tells his sister to have horses ready, and next comes a dissolve to the girl with the horses and the men coming to her through the woods. The fact of the escape is all that matters and no footage is wasted on the details of it. The same treatment throughout causes the story to move along briskly.

David Howard's direction is excellent except in spots where the dialogue is too loud. O'Brien and Fields pull up their horses on the outskirts of a town in which O'Brien, to gain the confidence of the outlaws, is about to stage a hold-up. It is a quiet night, and the two discuss the details of the raid in tones loud enough to be heard by anyone within a range of half a mile. The loudness itself is not the chief weakness of the scene. All the drama of it is destroyed by the casual manner of their

conversation. If they had conversed in whispers, the scene would have been much more impressive.

All the performances are satisfactory. O'Brien is his usual vibrant self, alive to both the dramatic and comedy values of his scenes. Fields gives a remarkably efficient performance. I saw him once in a sympathetic role and have been wondering ever since why producers fail to realize his possibilities. James Bush is a talented young actor who gives a good account of himself, and Victor Potel also scores in a comedy role. Irene Ware is entirely acceptable in her contribution to the love interest.

## Bob Bobs Up Again

PETTICOAT FEVER, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Directed by George Fitzmaurice; screen play by Harold Goldman; from the play by Mark Reed; produced by Frank Davis; musical score by Dr. William Axt; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Elmer Sheeley, Edwin B. Willis; wardrobe by Dolly Tree; photographed by Ernest Haller, A.S.C.; film editor, Fredrick Y. Smith; assistant director, Sandy Roth. Cast: Robert Montgomery, Myrna Loy, Reginald Owen, Otto Yamaoka, George Hassell, Forrester Harvey, Irving Bacon, Bo Ching, Iris Yamaoka.

WE HAVE this picture to thank for bringing Bob Montgomery back to us. It seems years since I have seen him on the screen. I have my own list of favorite picture performers and Bob is up near the top. I am Scotch enough to want more than critical fodder when I view a picture. I want to be entertained, to have a good time, and Bob never fails me. In *Petticoat Fever* he is excellent. He is one actor who always can make impudence entertaining.

George Fitzmaurice performs the miracle of keeping all his characters on one small, unattractive set for almost the entire length of the picture and never failing to hold the interest of the audience in the progress of the story. Harold Goldman's screen play sticks closely to the play, but the direction of Fitzmaurice makes the picture a more lively piece of entertainment than the play managed to be. When one sees how intimate the camera can make a play, how more real a stage story becomes when the camera takes the audience into the immediate presence of the players, he realizes why the stage is languishing except on Broadway, its last stand against the onslaught of the potent motion picture camera.

*Petticoat Fever* is just another demonstration of the superiority of the screen as a medium for the presentation of stage plays. I still think the screen would get farther by giving us motion pictures again, entertainment in which the spoken word plays second fiddle to the camera, but photographed plays sprinkled through the output of screen offerings always will command an audience.

There is not much to say about *Petticoat Fever* except that it is amusing entertainment, cleverly directed, well acted, graphically produced and competently photographed. The whole thing is preserved in ice, the locale being Labrador in the winter. It is an extraordinary production feat. In the few outdoor shots we see miles of ice, great blocks piled up by a surging sea to lose themselves against the far horizon. When we reflect that the whole thing was shot on the Metro lot, we wonder again at the uncanny skill of the unsung heroes of technical staffs who perform such miracles. I do not know how they perform the wonders and I will not permit anyone to

tell me. I prefer to blink at them in ignorant amazement.

And I also like to blink at Myrna Loy. She is as captivating as usual in *Petticoat Fever*. And Reginald Owen is a delight as the silly-ass Englishman whose plane crashes near Montgomery's wireless station. Winifred Shotter, the picture's nearest approach to a heavy, is a newcomer to the screen. At least I never saw her before. Her debut is auspicious and I see no reason why she should not become a favorite. The other members of the cast do nothing to lower the acting average.

### *Is Over-Characterized*

MOONLIGHT MURDER, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Directed by Edwin L. Marin; produced by Lucien Hubbard, Ned Marin; screen play by Florence Ryerson, Edgar Allan Woolf; suggested by the original story by Albert J. Cohen, Robert T. Shannon; musical score by Herbert Stothart, Edward Ward; operatic sequences arranged by Wilhelm von Wymetal; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Gabriel Scognamillo, Edwin B. Willis; wardrobe by Dolly Tree; photographed by Charles Clarke, A.S.C.; film editor, Ben Lewis; assistant director, Les Selander. Cast: Chester Morris, Madge Evans, Leo Carrillo, Frank McHugh, Benita Hume, Grant Mitchell, Katherine Alexander, J. Carrol Naish, H. B. Warner, Duncan Renaldo, Leonard Ceeley, Robert McWade, Pedro de Cordoba, Charles Trowbridge.

THAT a murder mystery can be made into an interest-screen drama was demonstrated by Brian Marlow and Robert Yost who wrote the screen play for Paramount's *Preview Murder Mystery*, and Robert Florey, who directed it. As much cannot be said for Metro's *Moonlight Murder*. Florence Ryerson, quite an adept at fabricating mysteries, and Edgar Allan Woolf wrote the screen play, Edwin L. Marin directed, a capable cast was provided and it has the usual Metro attractive and harmonious mounting, but it succeeds only in being rather indifferent entertainment.

It has the fault that characterizes all murder mystery films. Mechanically it points the finger of suspicion first at this character and then at that, and in the end the hand of the law is placed on the shoulder of one against whom no case had been established. In this instance the law does not uncover the criminal. When sufficient footage has been shot, Grant Mitchell, perhaps the least suspected of all possible murderers, steps to the front and confesses to the crime. Thus all the previous running around of the police had no bearing on the solution of the mystery.

Prior to the murder, which turns out to be a "mercy killing," the picture goes through its most interesting phase. Leo Carrillo, who ultimately becomes the essential corpse, is the tenor of an opera company presenting *Il Trovatore* in Hollywood Bowl, and the picture avails itself of the opportunity to present a musical interlude of artistic merit. Leo's goings-on with two members of the company, Benita Hume and Katherine Alexander, provide some amusing comedy.

The mechanics of story construction fairly creak in the case of the part which that able comedian, Frank McHugh, plays. In deference to the obsession that "comedy relief" must be sprinkled through drama to guard against its becoming too interesting, Frank is given comedy scenes apparently designated solely to appeal to whatever arrested developments there may be among the mor-

ons in the audience. Another excellent actor, Robert McWade, is given a series of quarrels to enact to delay the story until the required amount of footage was shot.

And while in a carping mood I might as well go ahead and pick holes in Chester Morris' characterization. Besides being a very nice boy, Chester is a talented actor and no blame attaches to him. Solving a murder mystery is a grave business, but Chester is not permitted to take it gravely. As directed, he regards it somewhat as a lark. Characters in a mystery picture should not be played to attract attention to themselves as characters. The only thing that matters is the solution of the mystery, the triumph of the law. The law officers should move through it as impersonal machines concerned only with their duties. An audience cannot attach more importance to a crime than the officers of the law attach to it. The comedy element in the performances of McWade and Morris make it impossible to take the picture seriously.

But Madge Evans is in the cast. That compensates for almost everything else. Now if I could see Frances Dee and Joan Bennett again, my good humor would be restored completely.

### *Unsatisfactory Entertainment*

LITTLE MISS NOBODY, 20th Century-Fox. Executive producer, Sol M. Wurtzel; directed by John Blystone; screen play by Lou Breslow, Paul Burger, Edward Eliscu; based on story by Frederick Hazlitt; photography, Bert Glennon; Art direction, Duncan Cramer; assistant director, Sidney Bowen; film editor, Al De Gaetano; sound recorder, Donald Flick. Cast: Jane Withers, Jane Darwell, Ralph Morgan, Sara Haden, Harry Carey, Betty Jean Hainey, Thomas Jackson, Jackie Morrow, Jed Prouty, Claudia Coleman, Donald Haines, Clarence H. Wilson, Lillian Harmer.

THIS is a story of children made into a picture for children. It asks adults to take too much for granted. For instance, no one can make me believe that a child can push a baby-carriage fast enough to overtake a light truck which had a long start on her, that the same child can jump to the tailboard of the truck, transfer dressed turkeys from the truck to the perambulator and make away with her loot without discovery by anyone. Young children still in the fairy-story age will accept such goings-on, and for them *Miss Nobody* might prove entertaining.

But will it prove beneficial for them? Technically the sequence referred to above makes Jane Withers, the featured child, a thief. Other scenes reveal her as a liar. Still others show her as a brat. True, most of her moral digressions are inspired by unselfish motives, but do we want our children taught it is all right to steal and lie if the end to be served is worthy?

Apart from its moral aspect, the weakness of the story is that it makes little Jane too old for her years. She does little that a child of her age would do of her own volition. Twentieth Century's attempt to make another Shirley Temple of her will not be successful. Jane is too definitely the character type. She is an actress. Shirley is a personality; she glides through a picture with effortless charm and makes us believe in everything she does because she was born with the most precious attribute an artist can possess, the ability to conceal all evidence of her art.

Little Jane, on the other hand, has to work hard for every effect she achieves. We get the impression that she

is acting, the same impression all character actors give us. She would be a real success in supporting character roles, but lacks the personality that would make her popular in leading parts.

All the members of the cast work hard to put the picture over, but it does not succeed in being satisfactory entertainment, despite John Blystone's capable direction. Jane Darwell, Ralph Morgan, Sara Haden, Harry Carey, Tom Jackson and Clarence Wilson give good performances. There are a lot of children in the picture, and as is usual with children, their performances are excellent.

### *Halperins Busy Again*

**I CONQUER THE SEA**, Victor and Edward Halperin production. Directed by Victor Halperin; story by Richard Carroll; photography by Arthur Martinelli; art director, F. P. Sylos; film editor, Douglas Biggs; sound technician, G. P. Costello; production manager, John Hicks; technical director, Leigh Smith; musical director, Arthur Kay; musical supervision, Abe Meyer. Cast: Steffi Duna, Stanley Morner, Douglas Walton, George Cleveland, Johnny Pirrone, Fred Warren, Madame Delinsky, Olin Francis, Fred Peters, Jim Hertz, Albert Russell, Charles McMurphy, "Tiny" Skelton, Dorothy Kildaire, Donna James (also double), Renee Daniels, Margaret Woodburn.

**E**DWARD HALPERIN, producer, and Victor Halperin, director, are at it again. They form a persistent team that has been bobbing up at intervals for the past decade, producing pictures which strike a satisfactory average and bring comfortable returns to the box-office. I do not know what their films cost, but the overhead is small and practically all the money gets on the screen, consequently their productions are imposing and give full value to ticket purchasers. They have built the name Halperin until it means something to exhibitors.

Last week I viewed the first picture of their new series, *I Conquer the Sea*. Its outstanding features are Victor's intelligent direction and Arthur Martinelli's superb photography. There is one shot of a young woman holding a baby that is a cinematic Madonna of remarkably artistic merit. Its composition, lighting and photography, the simplicity of its treatment, make its beauty arresting. There are many other examples of exquisite photography, but the Madonna reveals the motion picture camera at the peak of its artistic achievement.

The picture has educational value. It presents remarkable scenes of whaling with hand harpoons, thrilling scenes which in themselves make it worthwhile screen entertainment. The locale is the coast of Newfoundland and much of its rugged beauty is brought to the screen to give the production a wide scenic sweep which will please any audience.

Steffi Duna plays the leading part. I have seen her only once before, in a color short the title of which I cannot spell nor pronounce so readily as to aid anyone else in telling me how it is spelled. I suppose if I were not so lazy I would make an effort to run down the spelling, but it does not matter. Anyway, the Halperin picture is the first to introduce me to Miss Duna in the cast of a feature production. Her performance prompts me to wonder why we do not see her more frequently. She displays intelligence and rare acting ability, rising to emotional heights that are compelling.

The story is not an entirely convincing variation of the triangle theme, but the picture has other merits to

offset its story weakness. Two brothers are the other two-thirds of the triangle, played capably by Stanley Morner and Douglas Walton, two agreeable young fellows who give promise of successful careers in pictures. George Cleveland is another who gives an outstanding performance.

Victor Halperin's direction makes the most of the picture's possibilities. It is restrained and effective and he is equally competent with both the intimate scenes and the mass shots.

The brothers were the producers of *The Zombies*, quite an extraordinary conception. They are now shooting *The Return of the Zombies*, which no doubt also will be extraordinary. They are a pair of industrious and ambitious young men whose productions always have the virtue of cleanliness in addition to the quality of their entertainment.

### *Nice Little Offering*

**FARMER IN THE DELL**, RKO. Associate producer, Robert Sisk; directed by Ben Holmes; screen play by Sam Mintz, John Grey; from the novel by Phil Stong; production associate, John E. Burch; photographed by Nick Musuraca, A.S.C.; musical director, Alberto Colombo; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate, Al Herman; recorded by John L. Cass; edited by George Hively; assistant director, Kenny Holmes. Cast: Fred Stone, Jean Parker, Esther Dale, Moroni Olsen, Frank Albertson, Maxine Jennings, Ray Mayer, Lucille Ball, Rafael Corio, Frank Jenks, Spencer Charters.

**P**LEASANT entertainment, another nice job by Associate Producer Robert Sisk to follow his *Two in Revolt*, the picture which stars a horse and a dog and is quite a remarkable production. *Farmer in the Dell* features Fred Stone, Jean Parker and others, was directed by Ben Holmes, and comes out as an amusing comedy which takes a satirical glance at Hollywood's manners and customs. Sam Mintz and John Grey developed the screen possibilities of Phil Strong's book in keeping with Hollywood's habit of trying to get as many speeches as possible into every reel.

The story is one of an Iowa farmer who moved to Hollywood with his wife and daughter. Badgered by his wife into endeavoring to get their daughter in pictures, he succeeds only in getting in himself. The scene richest in comedy is one where he tries to get out. The wife and daughter go Hollywood, but all ends happily. RKO has given the picture a smart production, to which Nick Musuraca's photography does full justice.

Fred Stone reflects greater ease before the camera than he did in *Alice Adams*, made on the same lot. He gives a really good performance. A lot of the stage still sticks to him, however. He delivers his lines to force them beyond footlights, and his voice lacks flexibility, lacks the conversational expression which is essential to a completely satisfactory screen performance.

Moroni Olsen, playing a film director, runs away with the acting honors. Jean Parker, Esther Dale and Frank Albertson handle their roles capably.

There is just one quick flash which illustrates my constant argument that intelligent direction can make it unnecessary for the audience to hear nonessential dialogue. Esther Dale and Jean Parker head for the kitchen to prepare lunch. Miss Dale says something about what they are going to have and continues her speech as the

two walk away from the camera. What she says is lost as the distance from the camera increases, until the two are so far from the audience that it cannot hear what Miss Dale is saying. But we lose nothing as we know what she is talking about and that it is of no consequence to us. It is technique which if applied more frequently could eliminate a good deal of the chatter which clutters up so many pictures.

### *Paramount Offers a Musical*

**GIVE US THIS NIGHT**, a Paramount picture. Producer, William LeBaron; director, Alexander Hall; assistant director, James Hogan; screen play, Edwin Justus Mayer, Lynn Starling; based upon a story by Jacques Bachrach; sound, H. M. Lindgren; film editor, Ellsworth Hoagland; art directors, Hans Dreier, Roland Anderson; special effects, Gordon Jennings, A.S.C.; photographer, Victor Milner, A.S.C.; music by Erich Wolfgang Korngold; lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein, II. Cast: Jan Kiepura, Gladys Swarthout, Philip Merivale, Benny Baker, Michele Burani, William Collier, Sr., Sidney Toler, Charles Judels, Maurice Cass, John Milner, Alan Mowbray, Mattie Edwards, Chloe Douglas, Nick Thompson, Bob Milash, Monte Carter, Constantine Romanoff, Sam Appel.

Reviewed by ALLAN HERSHOLT

**T**HE assignment to cover a picture blending the work of Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Oscar Hammerstein, II, Alexander Hall, Jan Kiepura, Gladys Swarthout, Edwin Justus Mayer and Lynn Starling pleased me. Such a combination failing to result in genuine entertainment was far from probable, I felt. The expected treat did not come.

Splendid singing by Kiepura and Miss Swarthout of delightful Korngold-Hammerstein compositions, a superb acting performance by Alan Mowbray and fine photography by Victor Milner do not compensate for the writing and direction which principally are at fault.

To me, *Give Us This Night* has the distinction of being the initial Alexander Hall directorial effort calling for unfavorable comment. Heretofore, Hall, so far as I know, has been handed only good, substantial stories, well scripted, to film. Confronted with this hackneyed, weak theme, fashioned into an inadequate screen play, he has failed, which was unexpected. The film is responsible for the disappearance of my belief in his ability to succeed even with a bad script. A Lubitsch or a Capra, I am certain, would have made of this an acceptable offering. Hall seemingly has put forth no effort to improve upon his material.

The apparently-expensive, elaborately-prepared *Give Us This Night* is utterly without conviction, deplorably rich in artificiality. Frequently permitting conventional liberties to take part, entirely devoid of freshness in narrative-development and excessive in dialogue, most of which is dull, the picture will bring very little satisfaction to its producers and to those filmgoers who see it. A couple of its prominent exterior settings fall short of achieving the required degree of actuality, for which I lay blame to Hans Dreier and Roland Anderson, art directors, whose work otherwise is satisfactory. Photographer Milner has performed his duties with a degree of skill never before surpassed during his distinguished career.

Edwin Justus Mayer and Lynn Starling present scripting that is very much beneath the standard of both. The Jacques Bachrach story is so completely lacking in origin-

ality and so frail that selecting it as the subject of a super production was an act without the use of common sense. Even given excellent treatment, it could not have been an outstanding photoplay. Korngold's music and the libretto of Hammerstein are altogether successful, but, like the beautiful vocal work of Kiepura and Miss Swarthout and Mowbray's grand portrayal, are able to do little towards making the film worth while. Fine as the Korngold-Hammerstein compositions and their presentation are, we get so great a quantity of them that they become boring and make one aware of their serving to pad the insufficient material into a feature-length affair.

Mr. Kiepura, who never has won any wreaths of laurel for his histrionic ability, limits his portrayal to a mechanical, forced gaiety that seldom is convincing. The charming Miss Swarthout is given slight opportunity to display her talent as an actress. Alan Mowbray's performance is capable of withstanding the scrutiny of the most captious observer. He succeeds easily in stealing the acting honors from every other member of the cast. Here is a player who always manages to do splendidly, no matter how meager a part he portrays. Philip Merivale, of the stage, has a blah role and gives a performance that matches it. The comedy of Benny Baker, Sidney Toler and Charles Judels failed altogether to amuse me. The other players mean almost nothing.

### *Charlie at the Circus*

**CHARLIE CHAN AT THE CIRCUS**, 20th-Fox release of the John Stone production featuring Warner Oland. Screen play by Robert Ellis and Helen Logan, based on the Earl Derr Biggers character; photographed by Daniel Clark; art director, Duncan Cramer; film editor, Alex Troffey. Supporting cast: Keye Luke, George and Olive Brasno, Francis Ford, Maxine Reiner, John McGuire, Shirley Deane, Paul Stanton, J. Carrol Naish, Boothe Howard, Drue Leyton, Wade Boteler, Shia Jung.

Reviewed by PAUL JACOBS

**L**IKE most embryonics, I suppose I take myself and my opinion too seriously. As a matter of fact, I have a nasty little suspicion that, perhaps, the unaccustomed weight of my new dignity has rendered me analytically bow-legged; for I find myself deliberately looking for errors—and I derive a distinctly morbid glee from the finding. I hope it's just a form of growing pains.

As for Charlie Chan's latest—yes and no. It depends upon your cinematic taste. If you, like most of us, enjoy the same mystery hokum, adroitly garnished with the old suspense tricks, including sinister shadows, baleful glances, and dire whisperings from almost all suspects, an escaped gorilla menacing our doughty detectives and several fair young maidens; and—how shall I say it gently?—the inevitable comedy relief that is anything but relief—if these, compactly woven, and toned by a cleverly contrived and uniquely executed climax, are of interest to you—don't miss Charlie at the Circus.

But, for students of Cinema, the mechanics of production and plot-structure will hold interesting weaknesses. Significantly, the most fundamental error, is the one almost invariably committed. The story threads are woven and tied by dialogue.

Inherently, the texture of all mystery-mechanics is objective. Definite acts committed, specific clues to follow, physical steps in sleuthing or pursuit, resultant; even a mystery built entirely on inductive logic must (for audience clarity) be handled objectively. In this picture, forty minutes of intricately tangled developments are unraveled and explained in an approximate two minutes of dialogue. I'm not sure yet about the answer.

With a single exception, the cast is pre-eminently capable, Warner Oland giving his usual unusual portrayal of America's number one Chinese sleuth. The man is a consummate artist (i.e. he never acts; he's simply a smart Chinaman). Which reminds me—now that he's gone to the Orient—wonder if there are any family skeletons in some Chinese closet? He's almost too good not to be true.

In abrupt contrast is the dramatic attempt of Keye Luke, a well-bred young Chinese American, to portray a well-bred young Chinese-American. Aside from his facial convolutions, there is a graver fault for which he cannot be blamed. The Powers that Be, with their keen grasp of cinematic values, know that everyone in a talkie, from the hula dancer to the Bowery detective, must have a degree from an accredited School of Voice. So we see a wise-cracking, ultra modern China-boy giving vent to speech with dictional and enunciative purity that would make most professors ashamed of their own crudeness.

However, the production as a whole was well done. The atmosphere authentic, the scenics valid and believable, splendid photography and, somewhat unusual for the mystery pictures, the script was plausible and well-written. General credit goes to Director Harry Lachman. And you'll like Olive Brosno, the cutest and cleverest little actress in the picture—watch her eyes in her big scene when she pleads with Oland to take the case.

*Charlie Chan at the Circus* is family entertainment. The kids will go for it.

### *Paul Seems to Like It*

TOO MANY PARENTS, Paramount. Producer, A. M. Botsford; supervisor, Jack Cunningham; director, Robert F. McGowan; assistant director, Nate Watt; from stories by Jessie Lynch Williams, George Templeton; screen play, Virginia Van Upp, Doris Malloy; sound, Earl Hayman; film editor, Edward Dmytryk; art directors, Hans Dreier, Robert Odell; photographer, Karl Struss, A.S.C. Cast: Frances Farmer, Lester Matthews, Porter Hall, Henry Travers, Billy Lee, George Ernest, Sherwood Bailey, Douglas Scott, Colin Tapley, Buster Phelps, Howard C. Hickman, Sylvia Breamer, Doris Lloyd, Lois Kent, Jonathan Hale.

Reviewed by PAUL JACOBS

I PRESENT this one and I hate its director. The inconsiderate brute didn't leave me a darn thing to criticize. I don't know what is coming over producers; twice now, in the same evening, they have defied Hollywood precedent—picked a good director and—actually let him direct.

*Too Many Parents* is the story of boys whose folks have broken up, with a military school as the solution. The materials and theme could easily (and in the past, usually have) made just another cinematic tragedy. I have a deep and painfully-earned distrust of all child

pictures; they either make me downright ill, or just plain mad. Depends on whether they are impossible, or good enough to be merely bad. This one sent me away sincerely touched and thoughtful. A shower of encomiums at the feet of Robert McGowan. When a director can put a flock of kids through every emotion a kid is capable of, do it naturally, sensitively, with depths and peaks of exquisitely shaded dramatic patterns—with never once a trace of unnaturalness, of goeeyness or strain—that director is a director who is a director.

The cast is perfect. There is not one out-of-character portrayal, and that, in a production entirely about children, is something my brief experience has never encompassed until now.

The outstanding performance, in this galaxy of outstanding performances, is that of Geo. Ernest as Phil Stewart. The boy has everything, sensitive intelligence, keen grasp of subtle values, a refreshing manliness, a sturdy frame and American-boy good looks. The appeal of his artistry is so powerful you want to smack his stupidly unthinking and unsympathetic father, tell him what you think of him, and then lead little Phil off home and try to make up to him what he's missed of home life and love.

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I could carry on like this for pages, but what's the use? You must see it; and you will only agree with me. From Billy Lee to Sherwood Bailey you are captivated by these lovably human little gentlemen. And Carl Switzer's heroic rendition of *A Little White Gardenia* will lay you in the aisles.

Frances Farmer gives Hollywood a lesson in warm, well-bred restraint—a gentlewoman, and a good egg. Henry Travers as Mr. Wilkins, the janitor and school savant, is the kind of chap you hope your father-in-law will be.

The mechanics are smoothly executed and weave the structure into a convincingly well knit whole, observing the often forgotten rule that no one part of any production should obtrude itself over the work as a unit. The dialogue is always relevant, believable, and used to further the story. And right here, with fingers trembling in ecstasy, I herald a production without comedy relief! One or two brief touches of humor, there only because the normal story progression finds itself in a laugh-provoking sequence.

Humbly, then, I submit one timid criticism—on the continuity. The story concerns, as its principal character, the problems of Phil Stewart. The others are supplementary and of secondary importance; yet the picture opens with the complexities of "Butch" Talbot, another of the boys. The audience naturally (just as it would in a magazine story) subconsciously places its interest and sympathy in the first important character. Thus a mental and emotional readjustment is necessary. It is a common fault—and needless.

Howard Hall's *Hollywood Cinema Digest* gives in concise form a comprehensive idea of what papers throughout the country are saying about motion pictures made in Hollywood and the film industry generally. I find it of value and I am sure it would be to all those engaged in the creative branches of picture making.

# The New York Spectacle

By  
Betsy Beaton

New York, March 23.

IN HIS column of March 11th, cabled to the *World-Telegram* from Vienna, Westbrook Pegler pans Europe in general. "I've been driven across many state boundaries at home and sometimes I've been guilty of very strong opinions regarding the reigning politicians thereof. But even on entering Louisiana at the height of his power I didn't find it necessary to declare an admiration for Huey P. Long, the dictator of the moment, and I doubt whether the Americans entering Georgia or Kansas today are made uncomfortable should they express doubt regarding Eugene Talmadge or Alfred Landon.

"It appears that Los Angeles, which is not a state but a condition, and a clear one at that, has recently made another attempt to impose immigration restrictions on the poor. But in that case a formality which is perfectly normal in Europe has been denounced as a conspicuous outrage against ordinary liberty in the United States. . . . You must come over for the Olympic Games and take a little swing through Switzerland, Italy, Austria, the Balkans, Russia and Czechoslovakia. Then go home and fall on your face and kiss the granite blocks on West Street where the steamboats are tied up."

In the present mess and series of crises one can't help but agree with him. When you can drive through several European countries in a day, you become inclined to compare their size with the size of our states. And when you realize how small they really are, it is appalling to think how their hatreds, intrigues and rivalries may soon lead to war again—and this time it may in truth be a war to end all war, since it may quite simply end everything. Incidentally Pegler writes his views of Hitler and of the Nazis in such generous and certain terms that when he does once again see the granite blocks of West Street he will do well to fall on his face and kiss them, not only with joy of being back in a comparatively sensible land, but also with relief at being anywhere at all. And those of us who read his daily column with the feeling that we are reading real American literature as it is born, will be relieved with him at his safe return.

\* \* \*

One of the oddest, yet most lovable of stage characters is George M. Cohan. We went to see him in his new play, *Dear Old Darling*, the other night and were completely taken with him. No one in the theatre today embodies the word "charm" more than he does. A warmth seems to pervade the theatre from the moment of his first entrance. His entrances, however, are few and far between as Mr. Cohan has written a play around himself in which he seldom makes an exit. He is in front of his audience all the time, which fortunately satisfies the spectators as well as Mr. Cohan.

The title, *Dear Old Darling*, I must admit, filled me with certain misgivings before I had actually seen the play. I realized that Mr. Cohan might have been fooling, but then again the horrible thought would creep in that it might be on the level. I had never seen Mr. Cohan be-

fore. No matter what he is inclined to call his next vehicle, I will feel no qualms as I'm completely sold on the gentleman who claims to have written some fifty plays and 350 or so songs, the famous *Over There* among them.

It's true that some of the very tricks that have endeared Mr. Cohan to his public for years proved fairly discomfiting to our party. In the middle of the first act it occurred to one of us that the reason it was impossible to keep our eyes off the dynamic "American Stage Actor" was not only because of said actor's magnetic powers but also because Mr. Cohan did things with his hands and feet. He pulled his large white handkerchief out of his pocket as many times as he has written plays, and walked in circles, triangles, rectangles and other angles as fast as his short legs could carry him. His every sentence seemed punctuated by a movement of his expressive fingers. The little high kicks, reminiscent of his *Song and Dance Man* days, which he would execute just before the fall of each curtain, might make you wonder a bit.

But then the entracte would be over and Mr. Cohan's hypnotic hands and quietly expressive voice would lull you into a state of credulity. I would rather Mr. Cohan didn't gesticulate as much but since I'm so prejudiced in his favor I don't suppose it really matters. The rest of the cast was good and the play itself was a worthy addition to a list of worthy plays. It's a great pity that it closed so soon, and if you were to ask us why, we would have to shrug our shoulders and tell you what you already know, that show business is unpredictable and that it's impossible to plot a chart through the treacherous seas of audience reaction.

\* \* \*

The closing of the Central Park Casino is symbolic of a phase of night club life that is already as much a part of local history as the Gay Nineties and the pre-war days of Rector's, Delmonico's, etc. Equipment that cost \$400,000 in 1929 was auctioned off for \$7,255 the other day. Bidding was brisk as the auctioneer moved from room to room followed by about two hundred persons whose plebian dress must have contrasted strangely with the imposing splendour of the pavillion, the Belasco and the Silver rooms. The Casino has been frequented for years by the very elite of society, stage and screen. The cover charge at one time struck a new high in New York night life.

Rich in prestige, it was known to a few that one side, the right as you came in the door of the pavillion room, was devoted to those who were wealthy and well-known while those persons seated on the left side of the room were the less important visitors. Gone are the days of the Casino, its champagne parties, after-opera dinners, beautifully garbed women, immaculately dressed men and the phenomenal sight of the park itself covered with snow from the glassed-in horse-shoe that surrounded the main room.

And the *New York Times*, in its whimsical report of this event, remains true to the spirit of those hectic, by-gone days, by what we trust is a not wholly unintentional

misprint: "Richard F. Saffin, a broker who lives at 50 Anderson street, Hackensack, bought forty-three champagne glasses for 18½ cents each—as a remembrance of the money he had spent in the past to fill them. As far as could be observed, he was the sole representative of the Casino's old clientele."

\* \* \*

It is rumored in certain circles that Lucrecia Bori's announced retirement will be followed by her marriage to a well-known philanthropist. . . . The season is unusually gay back here. Despite the Florida trek the night club life flourishes. The Stork Club and El Morocco still seem to garner the best of the trade. . . . The elevator strike, however, has seriously affected the theatre business. . . . The *Place Elegante*, one of New York's better known night clubs, has a most glamorous history. It was once the home of the Donahues and it was here that James Donahue shot himself. Next it was a famous speak-easy, the *Napoleon*. During depressing days the *Napoleon* closed only to re-open as the *Casa Blanca* under a different management. Again a shot echoed in its halls. The manager, Larry Fay, was killed by an employe and his riddled body lay on the third step of the beautiful circular stair-case. It was in this club, so the famous Broadway story goes, that a woman one night began to weep as if her heart were breaking. She had discovered that the room she was drinking in had once been her nursery. Louis Bromfield wrote about the house. Several movies were built around its legend, including *The House on 56th Street* and *Night After Night*. And now it is the *Place Elegante*. Perhaps another decade will add the finishing chapters to its history.

\* \* \*

Eleanor Martin has become one of New York's more successful portraitists. She works with pastels, not applying the crayon directly to the paper as nearly all artists do, but using a rolled piece of paper as the means of conveying the crayon to the canvas. Her flesh tints are exquisite. She is already contracted for some work on the coast and leaves in the spring. . . . A minor disturbance has been caused by a Mrs. W. E. Crews of Dallas, Texas, and a Mr. Henry Willis of Denver. Bored, probably, with life, they took to raising chickens in bottles, putting them in the bottles when they were a day old. The chickens grew quite large and their owners displayed them proudly in their respective towns, each thinking he had a monopoly on the idea. S.P.C.A. agents have been tearing their hair but find themselves helpless to do anything about the situation as the chickens' owners swear the chickens are perfectly happy and breaking the bottles might kill the captives. Perhaps I'm wrong, but, ludicrous as it may seem, I think that Mrs. W. E. Crews' and Mr. Henry Willis' parents would have benefited humanity by bottling up their offspring when a day old and filling the bottle with cold water.

\* \* \*

A small headline in the theatrical section of the New York Times, *Yokel Says Britain Likes Our Humor*, amused me so that I read the article underneath. I quote: "Alex Yokel, producer of *Three Men On A Horse* returned from England yesterday on the Ile De France, having successfully ushered his race-track farce into the London theatrical world. The astonishing part about it was, he said, that the play got more laughs in

London than it did here, where it has been running for more than a year, and he attributed its success partly to the fact that Londoners are amused at anything that 'ribs' American customs." It's a well known fact that the "cold and British" theory was exploded some time ago and that the English are the best audience in the world. English audiences remind me of Bob Benchley. His booming, insane laugh will dominate a whole audience of first nighters. I've seen the time when he has startled audiences out of their laxness and filled them with a sense of excitement. His laugh catches on like wild-fire. If he wanted to capitalize on his famous guffaw, he might hire himself out, as do the professional clappers of the Metropolitan claque. But to get back to the English audience. The same quiet brilliance and whole-hearted naiveté that is Robert Benchley's laugh is the English attitude to the stage and its players. Benchley's roar can instill faith and confidence in a lagging performance or a frightened actor, even as the enthusiasm of the British audience. Of course there are the times, we must admit, when Mr. Benchley sneaks out of the theatre before the play is finished.

The current attraction at El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood, *The Night of January 16*, is well worth a visit. It is both good drama and distinct novelty. It is just a murder trial story, but it is told in a refreshingly new way. It is staged so well by John Hayden that I scarcely was aware of the performances as such. I was back in my days of reporting when my business was to attend murder trials, and this one seemed about as real to me as any I could recall. Of course, dramatic license had to be taken with the rules of evidence, but if you are not finicky about a little thing like that, you will find the play well worth while.

\* \* \*

MGM press previews are the pleasantest to attend. Nice fellows from the studio publicity department double as ushers, ask reviewers where they would like to sit and escort them to the chosen seats. The most irritating to attend are those at which the choicest seats are reserved for studio applauders and reviewers are assigned to seats on the sides. That some studios ever get favorable reviews speaks volumes for the honesty of the reviewers.

## HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR

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for one year from date, to

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*Alert and a-longing and tense once more  
To window whining, nose down to the door:  
"I should hear, by now, his car in the drive,  
This is the time when he should arrive—  
And, there he is!" When work is through  
Does a wise one watch and wait for you?*

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Seventy-Thirty Hollywood Boulevard  
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For Good Dogs and Requisites and Such

SINCE 1914



*Hollywood*

20  
CENTS

# S P E C T A T O R

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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Vol. 11

APRIL 11, 1936

No. 1

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## Hollywood's Greatest Showman Emotions and the Box-Office

Spectator's Friends Send Greetings to It  
Upon Occasion of Its Tenth Birthday

### ...REVIEWS OF...

ABSOLUTE QUIET

BIG BROWN EYES

13 HOURS BY AIR

SMALL TOWN GIRL

I MARRIED A DOCTOR

THE MOON'S OUR HOME

BORN FOR GLORY

THE WITNESS CHAIR

TILL WE MEET AGAIN

BROADWAY PLAYBOY

THE COUNTRY BEYOND

THE UNGUARDED HOUR

MR. DEEDS GOES TO TOWN

---

THE SPECTATOR IS USED IN 411 SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES IN THE UNITED STATES

---

Dear Welford:

As a birthday present I am sending you a quart of vinegar for your inkwell. You are growing too damned amiable.

Sincerely,  
Dudley Nichols.

Dear Mr. Beaton:

Something is wrong with the system when a former member of the staff has to pay thirty-five dollars to wish his alma mater a happy birthday!

Doubtfully,  
DALTON TRUMBO.

Dear Dalton:

If I hadn't taken you out of a bakery and started you on your successful writing career, you couldn't afford to pay \$35 for anything.—W. B.

# HARRY SHERMAN

Producer of

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WILLIAM BOYD and JIMMY ELLISON

PARAMOUNT RELEASE

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Welford Beaton

. . . from . . .

*A No-Good-Guy*

C. K. C.

NUFF SAID

## Herewith

OUR GRATITUDE TO THOSE WHOSE CARDS OF GREETING ON THE SPECTATOR'S TENTH BIRTHDAY FORM A CONSIDERABLE PORTION OF THIS ISSUE. TRUE, THE GREETINGS WERE SOLICITED DURING A SELLING CAMPAIGN SO DISTINGUISHED FOR ITS LACK OF VIGOR AND HIGH-PRESSURE SALESMANSHIP THAT WE FEEL WE MAY ACCEPT THE GREETINGS SOLELY AS EVIDENCE OF THE REGARD IN WHICH THE SPECTATOR IS HELD AS A PUBLICATION DOING WHAT IT CAN TO BE USEFUL TO THE FILM INDUSTRY AND ITS PERSONNEL. DURING ITS TEN YEARS IT HAS BEEN SINCERE IN THE EXPRESSION OF ITS OPINIONS, AND AS IT PROCEEDS ON ITS WAY ITS PLEDGE TO ITS READERS IS THAT ITS EDITORIAL POLICY WILL CONTINUE TO BE GOVERNED ONLY BY ITS CONVICTIONS.

W E L F O R D B E A T O N

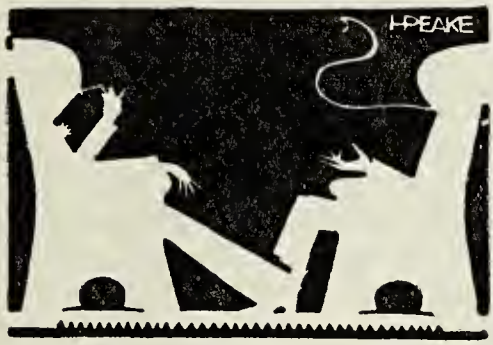
*Claudette Colbert*

*Joan Crawford*



*Barbara Stanwyck*

*Marguerite Churchill*



From the

# Editor's Easy Chair



## Hollywood's Greatest Showman

**H**OLLYWOOD always is in the market for showmanship. It pays salaries of thousands of dollars a week to men reputed to possess it.

"Showmanship" in Hollywood means ability to sense what the public wants and put it into motion pictures.

Because he is a good showman, Irving Thalberg receives for his services each year a sum sufficient to keep him a lifetime.

Because he is a good showman, Darryl Zanuck is paid five thousand dollars every week for making pictures for Twentieth Century-Fox.

Similar salaries are available for others who can demonstrate the possession of an equal sense of showmanship.

Yet there is available to Hollywood the greatest showman the world has ever produced, one who alone was responsible for the gigantic strides motion pictures made as universal entertainment, one who makes the Thalbergs and Zanucks look like infants.

This showman, well known to many who work in pictures and who are not permitted to profit by the acquaintance, is ignored by those who pay fabulous salaries for showmanship.

Producers are unaware that the services of this greatest showman of all time are available to them, and will not listen to anyone who endeavors to acquaint them with the fact.

The ignored showman could put into pictures the quality audiences in the silent days emphatically demonstrated they desired, could allay the discontent of exhibitors, could make all pictures do well at the box-office.

But Hollywood wants none of such showmanship. It prefers its own brand, prefers to continue on its own blundering course.

The name of the great showman is Screen Art.

## Emotions and Box-Office

**T**HE lifeblood of the film industry is the emotional content of its pictures, the degree in which the audience reacts emotionally to what is shown it. It is a matter of indifference to an audience whether it laughs or cries, whether it chills with terror or giggles with delight.

That is why the purely intellectual picture—*Of Human Bondage*, *Petrified Forest*—no matter how well produced or excellently acted, cannot appeal so strongly to so large an audience as a well produced and excellently acted story with a mother-love or other equally fundamental theme. People do not assemble in film theatres to think.

It is the mental rest which pure cinema gives even the most intellectual person in an audience that is the strength of the screen as a universal medium of entertainment.

All degrees of mentality are reduced to a common level by the true motion picture. The viewer's reaction is emotional, not intellectual. A purely psychological problem discussed in a talkie, can entertain him only to the extent his mental powers are able to cope with it; thus a picture based on a psychological theme cannot give the same degree of entertainment to all those composing an audience.

The stage gets its response from people who seek intellectual entertainment, and is losing its audience because of the screen's ability to present plays on the screen with greater effectiveness than they can be presented on the stage. But in its drift to plays as its story material the screen is losing that greater audience which never did patronize the theatre.

Since the dawn of talkies Hollywood has shown a too great disposition to go highbrow. The screen in its silent days by no means was lowbrow entertainment. It merely did not ask the cooperation of the intellect. Hollywood, however, has gone intellectual and the refusal of its audience to follow it has led to double bills, bank nights and other extraneous expedients to stimulate attendance. Motion pictures have demonstrated their ability to assemble the largest audience in the history of the world, yet the kind which Hollywood is making now can hold its audience only by dangling in front of it the hope of winning a large sum of money, a washing machine or a ham.

What a picture patron pays for admission to a film theatre is an investment in emotional reaction. What it cost to make the picture he views is of no concern to him. If he does not laugh or cry or experience a thrill, he does not receive an adequate return on his investment.

It is not the screen's mission to depict emotions. Its mission is to stir the emotions of the audience.

To make my meaning clear, let us consider the greatest moment in that completely great picture, *The Story of Louis Pasteur*. The film interests us in the trials and disappointments of the scientist, engages our sympathy for him, and in the end, when the French nation officially does homage to him, recognizes the great work he has done for mankind, the audience responds with a depth of emotion rarely experienced in a motion picture theatre. And yet the central figure does nothing, gives no intima-

MY HEARTIEST greetings and good wishes to Welford Beaton's HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR which has been a constructive force in the industry for the past decade. May it enjoy many more decades of success and prosperity.—  
Jesse L. Lasky.

tion of his own emotional reaction to what to us is a deeply moving scene. Paul Muni has played the part so ably, so completely has enlisted our sympathy, that when he stands still, does nothing and says nothing, tears come to our eyes, lumps to our throats, and our exultation bears tribute to our absorption in the drama of his life. It is the cumulative effect of all that has gone before, the masterly building to the great moment, the adroit presentation of all the elements composing the picture, that make the scene one long to be remembered.

There is no emotion in cold paint on a canvas, yet a great artist can put Soul into his composition, drawing and coloring, can so express himself in his medium that we are stirred emotionally when we view his picture. Yet when we suggest to a motion picture producer that he give greater thought to elemental emotions and less to massive productions, he thinks we want him to go *Pollyana*, to put tears on the screen for the audience to imitate, to depict emotion for the audience to gaze at.

A million dollars spread on a screen cannot evoke greater emotional response than can be matched by a properly made picture costing a tenth as much. The film industry's business is one of selling the public emotional stimulant. The public cannot be bribed by money into reacting emotionally to what is offered it.

If the industry would think less in terms of money and more in terms of its product, its shareholders would get more exhilarating dividends.

### *Neglecting the Little Ones*

EACH of the big studios announces it will make a number of outstanding pictures, no one of which will cost below one million dollars. Each announces also that it will make a score or more class B pictures, cheaper productions designed chiefly to meet the demand created by dual bills. The industry groans under what it calls the burden of two-feature programs, yet does everything in its power to perpetuate it. We will have dual bills as long as Hollywood persists in turning out pictures which will satisfy audiences only if they get two of them for the admission price they formerly were content to pay for one.

In spots and at irregular intervals box-office receipts are satisfactory, but the film audience as a whole is not growing. It still is thirty or forty million less in per-week attendance than it was when talkies were at the peak of their popularity. The present discontent of exhibitors, evidenced by the determined and united attempt of a majority of them to induce congress to abolish block booking, is due to unsatisfactory box-office receipts. Obviously if these exhibitors were prospering they would desire no change in conditions.

Only the entertainment quality of the industry's product as a whole will restore the prosperity producers once enjoyed. The relatively few million-dollar pictures will make permanent the public's habit of shopping for screen entertainment and encourage it to pass up those which cost less. The prosperity which built the industry was due to the public's indifference to individual offerings and its cheerful acceptance of everything presented to it. Its habit then was to go to picture houses no matter what was showing. Now its habit is to shop, to pick out the most

imposing pictures and neglect the others. The more imposing pictures are made, the more restricted will become the public's shopping range.

The industry's immediate problem is to bring its audience back to its potential maximum strength, and only the maintenance of an even level of entertainment quality in all its product will do that. It cannot be done by centering attention on the few big pictures and dismissing as unimportant the many smaller ones. The most important picture in any season's output always should be the one being made today. And its importance should be rated, not by what it cost, but by what it can be made to earn. No one picture costing one million dollars can be made so entertaining that it will gross more than the combined gross of five pictures, each costing two hundred thousand dollars and all of which received the same thoughtful consideration in production that was given the epic from its inception to its release.

It would seem logical, therefore, if any pictures are to be left largely to shift for themselves during production, they should be the few big fellows, and that the best brains in the studio should be concentrated upon the many little ones.

The dual bill policy offers the industry an opportunity to build its class B product into class A and eventually to make it unnecessary to spend a million dollars on one picture. It is not money spent in its making that makes a picture prosper at the box-office. The degree of its financial success is the degree of satisfaction it gives its audience. Telling an audience a picture cost one million dollars does not make it enjoy it five times as much as it does one it knows cost two hundred thousand.

### *The Foreign Invasion*

THE American film industry, it seems to me, is not displaying business wisdom in making it difficult for foreign-made pictures to reach American audiences. Some excellent productions from abroad never get farther than the vaults of American exchanges. The prosperity of the industry as a whole depends upon the size of its entire audience. Only the quality of the entertainment offered it will build the audience again to its former imposing proportions. Unless exhibitors are prosperous, producers cannot be assured of continued prosperity. A good foreign picture will get the industry farther than a poor domestic one. Side-tracking pictures high in entertainment value merely because they come from abroad is not good business. Anything that will bring the American audience back to its potential maximum is good business, no matter where the entertainment that will do it comes from.

England is sending us some excellent pictures which are being crowded off American screens by inferior class B offerings made in Hollywood. A Gaumont-British picture, *Born For Glory*, reviewed in this issue, has greater audience appeal than any class B production of American

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CONGRATULATIONS to the SPECTATOR on its tenth anniversary. May it continue to enjoy a long, active, and prosperous career, serving the best interests of the motion picture.—Sidney E. Samuelson, President, Allied States Association of Motion Picture Exhibitors.

make than I have seen in months, yet it is unlikely you will be given an opportunity to see it. American distributors accept a certain number of British productions and neglect to give them play dates. They get as far as the exchanges and stay there.

Instead of meeting British competition by crushing tactics, American producers should strive to meet it by increasing the entertainment quality of their own productions. The box-office is the source of origin of all the revenue of producers, and if a foreign picture can swell box-office receipts, the American industry should be sporting enough to show it and take a chance later of capturing for itself the increased business for which the picture from overseas is responsible.

Dual bills, which seem to be here to stay, offer an opportunity for familiarizing American audiences with foreign faces. If *Born For Glory* is offered with an American picture with featured players whose names attract patronage, the audience will be pleased more by the program as a whole than it would be if another domestic picture of inferior quality were given the second place on the bill. If, by a succession of such showings, Gaumont-British players grew to mean something to American audiences, there would be more money for the American producer for his contributions to double bills shared with British productions.

The first thing to do is to get the money into the box-offices. If a Gaumont-British picture coupled with one of ours will bring two dollars into the box-office, our share of the revenue will be greater than the per-picture returns on two of our own which bring in only one dollar. And if we can get the same gross returns by making half the number of pictures, we should not begrudge Gaumont-British its share of the receipts.

### As Others See Us

PERHAPS the reason the philosopher was without honor in his own home was his failure to tell his wife the nice things said about him elsewhere. This thought suggested itself to me when I was looking for an excuse, any excuse, for reproducing something about the SPECTATOR which appeared in an eastern publication. About half the SPECTATORS printed go to people in the motion picture world in this country and abroad. The other half circulates among schools, colleges, culture clubs, organizations interested in some aspect of the screen, film critics of a large number of publications, and a considerable number of people who are just names on the subscription list and whose reasons for subscribing are unknown to us.

The SPECTATOR has been the recipient of a great many published compliments which it would like to display proudly for the inspection of its readers in Hollywood. It shares with all human beings a fondness for applause, which, after all, is the most satisfactory dividend one draws in life. It is proud of the applause accorded it, and wanted to pass it on to all its readers, but a sense of modesty which has assumed nuisance proportions, has laid a restraining hand on its ego.

But perhaps on its tenth birthday it may be permitted to make itself a present in the form of a public parade of things others have said about it. For instance, it was

pleased when a prominent picture director wrote to it, in reference to its reviews of two of his pictures, "In an uncanny way you seemed to get between the sprocket holes and find a few of the subtle touches which I hoped would be noticed."

And quite the nicest thing written about it is this by Ina Roberts, published in *Books and Films*, Cleveland, Ohio, under the heading, "Good Advice":

Librarians and all others genuinely interested in the progress of moving pictures, in hoping and working for pictures that are fine without being dull, that are no less entertaining for exhibiting qualities that usually characterize films and books and plays contemptuously labeled highbrow by those to whom a synonym for that word is "dull"—all these are recommended to read the HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR. Its reviews will be found peculiarly helpful to librarians carrying on cooperation with films because these reviews meet the librarian on a congenial mental ground.

Mr. Welford Beaton, the editor (one suspects he writes every word of the publication), is unique as a critic. Critics, usually, are of two minds—they praise everything or they praise practically nothing. Mr. Beaton is endowed with a rare enthusiasm which he tempers with a keen flair for the faults of films; and lets run away with him in the case of pictures he does like.

His comments are shrewd, they are just and he has an unerring perception for beauty, which he values as beauty should be valued. In addition to the practical aid in evaluating films to be found in his reviews, if you happen to like to read literature, you will find it in every sentence, every phrase, he writes. Those of us who live in Cleveland and are so fortunate as to be able to enjoy the play reviews of Mr. William F. McDermott, the *Plaindealer's* dramatic critic, know the ever-startling thrill of finding literature in a newspaper.

If you want really to appreciate the HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR, read a few fan magazines first and then tackle the SPECTATOR. Mr. Beaton takes all the worn-out, superlative words and phrases that in film exploitation and publicity read as if patterned after a circus program, and, by his dexterous use of those superlatives and the apt interjection of an occasional new word or an old word used in a new way, provides you with a pair of rose-colored spectacles that give back to the poor, abused superlatives their one-time vigor and beauty. All that he writes is sound, common sense, business sense, embroidered with loveliness in the telling.

One wonders how Mr. Beaton happens to be writing about films instead of creating lyrics and sonnets or essays of the highest order.

The SPECTATOR's lack of modesty having indulged itself to the above extent, it might as well go ahead and add a few morsels of scattered applause:

*Christian Science Monitor*—The HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR is a reliable and searching West Coast screen publication.

*Literary Digest*—The HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR, a stimulating journal published in the very heart of Hollywood.

*Toronto Star*—No film paper ever came to this desk that raps out so many truths about pictures.

*London, England, Express*—Welford Beaton is America's most discerning motion picture critic.

*Argonaut, San Francisco*—Beaton is one of the most competent as well as the most courageous, candid and conscientious of all film critics; one who knows as much and seems to care more for the present and future of cinematic art than any other critic.

*Des Moines Register*—Mr. Beaton knows his subject at first hand; moreover he is a frank, purposeful writer, as well as a keen and thoughtful observer of everything pertaining to the making of motion pictures. He is a critic of fine judgment, and open minded enough to be well worth listening to on any motion picture subject.

*New York Post*—It is, also, most agreeable to find an Eastern critic who is familiar with the work of Welford Beaton, editor of the SPECTATOR. This clever, practical and witty critic has hammered more sense into the heads of motion picture directors

WILLIAM  
LE BARON

PARAMOUNT

HAL WALLIS

WARNER BROS.

ROBERT NORTH

COLUMBIA PICTURES



Hunt Stromberg

Producer of

THE GREAT ZIEGFELD

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER



than any man of recent years. What the movies have always needed has been honest criticism.

*Baltimore Sun*—Mr. Beaton has done good service for the films in years past, and has delivered himself at times of valuable, searching studies of various phases of the film industry.

*London, England, Evening News*—Welford Beaton, the most enlightened and broad-minded film critic in America.

*Cleveland, Ohio, Plaindealer*—Welford Beaton, a close intelligent observer of the movies.... The SPECTATOR's intelligence may and should be rated higher than that of any other publication dealing exclusively with photoplays.

### What Educators Say

ON ITS tenth birthday the SPECTATOR wishes to refer briefly to a few of the many letters of commendation that have been received from educators throughout the country. As has been said here before, the increased interest in motion picture appreciation throughout the country is an encouraging sign. Thousands of young minds are becoming acquainted with the fundamentals of screen art. The SPECTATOR has had some part in this activity.

From Santa Barbara Miss E. Louise Noyes of the Santa Barbara High School writes: "We are very glad here in Santa Barbara High School to have the SPECTATOR as my seniors find it a welcome change from the ordinary run of 'fan' and 'blah-blah' movie magazines. Mr. Beaton's sincerity of purpose is a real beacon to which they are glad to turn."

At Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, Arthur J. Todd, College of Liberal Arts, agrees with the SPECTATOR's attitude in a letter in which he says: "I am circulating the HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR through all the members of my department. Their reactions are highly favorable to your interesting and, I believe, discriminating and authentic critique of the movie industry. I quite sympathize with your plea for something in the way of a return to the old silent art which left somewhat more to our imagination and gave us the work of some outstanding artists who are now altogether too seldom seen."

Farther east, in Bridgeport, Connecticut, Miss Lucy S. Curtiss of the Central High School, tells us that this year the school has organized a club for the purpose of promoting a better interest in motion pictures and uses the SPECTATOR in this connection. While at the State Teachers College at Indiana, Pennsylvania, Miss Bernice Orndorff says they are glad to have the SPECTATOR for use in the English department.

While still on the eastern front, here is a quotation from a letter from Mrs. Margaret Holley Carson of the Madison High School, Rochester, N. Y.: "I prefer your reviews to all the rest put together. Last week I used nearly a whole period of my Movie Appreciation class to laud Mr. Beaton's reviews, and to compare their worth and dependability with those found in other papers and magazines. The pupils have the privilege of taking the magazine to read during their study periods. We depend on it largely for our decisions about what picture to see next, for the reviews usually precede the Rochester showings by just about a week."

Coming back to the Pacific Coast, Mr. Boyd B. Rakestraw of the University of California Extension Department, Berkeley, says our opinions have aided them decidedly in making the right choice of pictures. Perhaps

the most flattering compliment received was from Harold M. Turney, Chairman of the Department of Drama, Los Angeles Junior College, who writes: "I wish you would forward my congratulations to Mr. Beaton on his Number Five issue of Volume Ten. His Editor's Easy Chair was excellent, but I particularly enjoyed his reviews of new pictures. In this issue he seems to have something to say and says it, in no uncertain terms. For that, I am grateful. The students look forward to each issue of the SPECTATOR and nearly stand in line for the current number. My only problem is thievery. And as I am particularly interested in binding together each volume, a missing issue causes a great deal of grief. If things continue, it will be necessary for me to nail the SPECTATOR to the library table. That's how popular your magazine is with our students."

THE FILM INDUSTRY is like a giant pestered by knats and unaware that he has strength enough to rid himself of them. Any little tin-horn politician hailing from a backwoods township, can get up in congress and say things that scare the industry stiff. Possessing the most powerful publicity weapon ever given to man, it still is a great and cringing coward. It ties its own tongue by maintaining a long list of things it is afraid to put into pictures. Everyone knows that politics is rotten, that the House of Representatives has the lowest average intelligence of any such body in the world, yet a producer would get the jitters if you suggested to him that he make a picture based on a political theme. A member of congress is convicted of selling an appointment to West Point. Make a picture of that? Not while Will Hays, carrying aloft a white flag, leads the screen parade. It is one of the scores of things the screen is afraid to touch. Yet in congress the film industry is attacked constantly; its leaders held up to scorn and its product viciously condemned. If it would develop courage enough to thumb its nose at its own politicians, bare its teeth and lash out with just a little of the great strength it possesses, it soon would have every politician in the land humbly eating out of its hand. Give a few politicians a place on the screen and all the politicians would give the screen a place in the sun. But it is too much to hope for. The film industry will continue to be the giant pestered by knats.

\* \* \*

IN DISCUSSING A and B class pictures, the *Motion Picture Herald* remarks: "The whole motion picture industry is beginning to admit that there are several publics and various strata, and of theatres, and even of buying moods within audiences." All of which is true, and for that portion of it affecting itself, the film industry itself is responsible. The nature of its product built up the world's greatest and most stable audience. The motion picture was all that audience demanded, tragedy, drama, comedy presented to it in pictures. It became universal entertainment that the public formed the habit of patronizing almost as a matter of routine and with little regard for the nature of the individual offerings. The screen expressed itself in an elemental language all grades of intel-

DEAR WELFORD:

All the *Variety* muggs join me in wishing the SPECTATOR many happy returns of the day.—Arthur Unger.

RONALD COLMAN

FRED ASTAIRE



WARNER  
BAXTER

*Richard Dix*



lect could follow. The even level of patronage was maintained until Hollywood grew indifferent to the quality of its product, so stultified by its riches that it thought it could make pictures merely by hiring someone to turn a crank. Attendance fell off. Then came sound. And the end of motion pictures. Hollywood divided its one audience into groups; it gave the screen a foreign tongue with which to express itself; it destroyed the attendance habit and made its patrons shoppers. The several publics the *Herald* mentions merely are pieces of the one public the screen used to have as its own. And could have again if it had sense enough to realize why it lost it.

\* \* \*

IT HAS BEEN ONE of the SPECTATOR's oft expressed contentions that a motion picture should be cut in the script, that the story should be cut down to footage before shooting begins. I have had no practical experience in picture making, but I am sure it is not too complicated to permit common sense to be applied to every step. And common sense would dictate that a director should know before he starts just how much footage he will have when he finishes, and that such footage should be that in which the picture is about to be shown. And I am a firm believer in what Eisenstein told me on his first abortive visit to Hollywood, that all directors should be able to cut their own pictures, that training in cutting was essential to efficient directing. George Nicholls, Jr., has made facts out of my theories. For years he was a film cutter. Now he is a director for RKO. His most recent job was an Ann Harding picture, *The Witness Chair*. He brought it in in fifty-seven hundred feet. That means he cut it as he shot it. He was so sure of himself that he made no protection shots. With the titles and credits added, the picture will be released in fifty-nine hundred feet, a little shorter than is usual with important features, but Nicholls told his story and stopped shooting as soon as it was told. A great many pictures would be improved if they were not padded to conform to someone's conception of the proper length a feature should attain. There are plenty of three- or four-reel stories on the screen, but they are stretched through six- or seven-reel pictures.

\* \* \*

ONE DIFFICULTY encountered by one who comments on motion pictures almost exclusively from the standpoint of screen art and its esthetics, is the shortage of other commentators who approach the subject from the same angle and express views which he can quote to support his own arguments. For instance, since the dawn of talkies I have argued with persistent reiteration that stage contact harms screen art, but until today I never had run across a published utterance by a real authority which I could present to support my argument. One of the really great picture minds of the world is Pudovkin, the Russian who directed *The End of St. Petersburg*, *Mother*, and other cinematic masterpieces. Essays written by him and lectures he delivered at the State Institute of Cinematography, Moscow, have been assembled in a book, *Film Technique*. I shall review the book in a subsequent SPECTATOR but present now a brief quotation from it: "Cinematography advances with rapid stride. Its possibilities are inexhaustible. But it must not be forgotten that its path to a real art will be found only when it has been freed from the dictates of an art-form foreign to it—that is, the Theatre.

Cinematography now stands on the threshold of its own methods."

\* \* \*

THE REOPENING of the Carthay Circle Theatre as a long-run house is good news to the film people who formed its audiences in the pre-talkie days. Its screen is one of memories, and despite all the newness of motion pictures and the greater newness of the house itself, it is a theatre of traditions, a home to which we will return with a glow of pleasure. It was there that a little, unknown girl made us cry when she exulted, "I, too, am a remarkable fellow!", there that Janet Gaynor's fame was born in *Seventh Heaven*, where *Stella Dallas* was shown, and others that wrote screen history and were true to their own art. Two or three pictures a year kept the house open continuously. Today's pictures will not do as much. It will be interesting to await the industry's explanation of the lack of drawing power of its present product as compared with that which wrote Carthay Circle's long-run history. Of course, the answer is that yesterday's productions were motion pictures and today's are not, but the industry will have another answer. A ten-week run of a silent picture was a Carthay Circle flop. If any talkie runs eight weeks I will climb the theatre's tower and bite a hole in its top.

\* \* \*

MEMBERS OF Motion Picture Appreciation classes in schools and colleges are developing into letter writers. All of them, apparently, want to know how to approach the task of criticizing a motion picture. This paragraph will serve as a reply to several letters I received this week.

PETE SMITH

▼  
METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

IRVING  
PICHEL



*Greetings*

Wesley Ruggles

IRVING CUMMINGS



20th CENTURY-Fox

FRANK McDONALD



DIRECTOR

WARNER BROS.

I do not know how a picture should be criticized. The only approach I know is my own. I try to be rested when I set forth to see a picture. I anticipate having a good time. When a picture starts, I dare it to make me not like it, having previously made up my mind that I am going to see a good one. When I see a scene I do not like, I ask myself (a) why I do not like it, (b) if there is an excuse for what I deem is a fault, (c) how I think it should be done. If I can find no answer to one of these questions I do not criticize the scene adversely. Tolerance is the most important item in a critic's equipment for his job. He should realize that a picture's makers did the best they could and so deserve friendly consideration, that a lot of money has been spent on the production, and the critic should be sure of his ground before he condemns it. I think that is all.

\* \* \*

THE FILM INDUSTRY is doing a lot of the wrong kind of thinking about television. It seems to be disturbed about it, fears it will have a depressing effect on the film theatre box-office, gets goose-flesh every time it reads that it is about to be offered to the public. The industry need not concern itself with the technical progress television is making or the imminence of its launching as a general entertainment device. The only thing it need give consideration to is the public, and by applying a little psychology to its consideration, it will be solaced by the conviction that the very nature of the service television will offer, will make it impossible for it to assume any importance as competition motion pictures need fear. Anyone with an ounce of motion picture brains would know the fundamental difference between the two mediums, the psychological aspect of their separate appeals, and the reason why television never can attain popularity comparable with that which motion pictures have attained. Writers who gravely discuss the subject in the press are wasting a lot of good printers' ink.

\* \* \*

ANY NOVEL which becomes a best seller is bought promptly by the motion picture producer who outbids the others who try to get it. In most instances the elements which made the book a best seller is not screenable—the literary charm, the skill of the author in expressing himself in words, his habit of leading his readers away from the thread of the narrative to enjoy his pen's pokes at inconsequential. More books have been made successful by good writing than by good plots, and the plots provide all the photographic possibilities. There would be fewer headaches in studios during story preparation if producers, instead of buying a book because it is a best seller, would be governed by their estimate of its cinematic values. And it would be better still if producers would encourage the creation of their own story material. There are plenty of writers capable of writing all the stories the film industry needs, but the only way in which they can sell anything in Hollywood is to express themselves first in another medium for studios to paw over to uncover picture possibilities. Silly sort of procedure.

\* \* \*

CHARLES FURTHMAN, screen writer, is quite the most interesting individual in Hollywood. He does more extraordinary things than any other man I know. Charlie Chaplin was puzzling over how to cut *Modern Times*. He did not know where the laughs would come. Furth-

man took the film and a sound recording outfit to San Francisco, showed the picture, made a sound track of the audiences' reception, came back to Hollywood and he and Chaplin ran the picture with the applause sound track, and the picture was cut according to the laughs. It is the first time an audience in San Francisco cut a picture made in Hollywood. And how do you suppose Charlie Chaplin happened to include the song in the picture? He was cutting capers at Charlie Furthman's one night and when he gave evidence of being about to burst into song, Furthman turned on a phonograph recording attachment and caught the song on wax. Charlie was astonished when he heard it played back, decided it wasn't so bad and gave it a place in the picture.

\* \* \*

RECENTLY I ENJOYED a cinematic treat in viewing *Broken Earth*, a one-reel subject written and directed by Roman Freulich and superbly photographed by Jerome Ash. It was produced by Edward Spitz. Clarence Muse is the central figure in the powerfully pathetic little story, giving an appealing and intelligent performance. Negro spirituals are introduced to good effect. Those responsible for this little gem should be given opportunities to expand in a larger field. *Broken Earth* would adorn the most impressive film program in the biggest house.

\* \* \*

In *Robin Hood of Eldorado* a sheriff's mounted posse sets out to capture Murrieta. We see numerous shots of the chase. Up hill, down hill, on the level, through streams, the horses go on a dead run, at the peak of their speed. We are given the impression a considerable dis-

**SANTA MARIA INN**  
 SANTA MARIA, CALIFORNIA  
 Frank J. McCoy, Manager

*On the  
 Coast Highway  
 halfway between  
 San Francisco  
 and Los Angeles*

◆ "There is a restfulness about the Inn, an unobtrusive beauty that makes you feel comfortable and satisfied with yourself. But it is when you visit the dining-room for the first time that the Inn gets you. You think you've made a mistake and wandered into a flower show. The flowers are a background for the more solid business of appeasing material appetites. They attract customers, but the quality of the food holds them. Unesthetic travelers eat the food with no conscious appreciation of the beauty that surrounds them, yet it has a subconscious appeal that brings them back to the Inn and makes the food taste better and the beds feel softer."

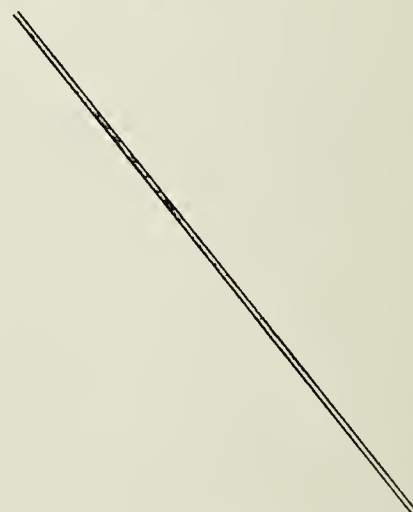
WELFORD BEATON  
 in  
 THE SPECTATOR

AL JOLSON

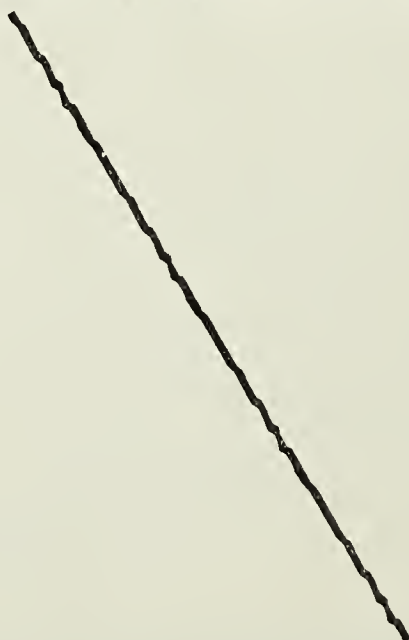


J. FARRELL

MacDONALD



BELA LUGOSI



ERIC  
LINDEN



tance is covered, as the bandit's hide-out, if close to the settlement, could not have remained so long undiscovered. Horses, like men, can sprint short distances at top speed, but there never existed horses which could live through such punishment as supposedly is given them in this picture. You see the same thing in every Western production, horses always dashing at full speed. On the ranges the regular pace is a lope when long distances are to be covered. If the posse had started for Murrieta at a steady lope there would have been menace in its movement, a suggestion of deadly threat to the bandit, of the law's cool determination to assert itself. But all we see are a lot of mounted fools apparently intent upon killing their horses.

\* \* \*

A SCREEN WRITER asked me to read a story he had written. I found it an interesting script with a Hollywood background, and recommended it to a producer. "We have just made a Hollywood picture and cannot follow it so closely with another," was the reason he advanced for not even reading it. I cannot follow such reasoning. All the public wants are pictures which will entertain it. As long as they rate high in entertainment value, I cannot see what difference it would make to audiences if all of them had Hollywood backgrounds. It is not the background the public pays to see. Its interest lies in what takes place against the background, in the human beings around whom the stories revolve, the degree in which its emotions are stirred. By refusing to consider the story, the producer I mention denied himself what could have been a box-office picture and based his action on just one of the foolish notions which prevail in Hollywood to its own detriment.

\* \* \*

The leading woman in *Three Women*, the outstanding foreign picture recently shown downtown, is quite small, no taller than a child in its early teens. In a war sequence the trench coat she wears reaches to the ground, giving her almost a grotesque appearance. The other two women, ordinary adult size, look relatively neat, as their coats fit them. The big coat on the little leading woman is one of the nicest bits of attention to detail I have seen for a long time. War is a serious business, too serious to take time out to cut trench coats to the measure of undersized Red Cross nurses. But can you imagine one of our Hollywood leading women being allowed to parade through a picture in an unfitting garment? If the picture had been made here the little leading woman would have been attired immaculately, her hair marcelled, her lips rouged, her eyebrows etched in crayon. Not even a world war would have been permitted to affect the sacred rites of dolling up.

\* \* \*

IF THERE IS A FACT about the motion picture industry that Jack Alicoate did not run to earth and include in his *Film Daily 1936 Year Book*, I have no way of knowing, but I do know that the bulky and well printed volume is invaluable to everyone engaged directly or indirectly in the making of pictures. In its meticulous attention to even inconsequential details it goes to the extreme length of naming my birthplace. How it gained the knowledge puzzles me extremely. And here are some of the things that make it such an extraordinary volume: 1935 Re-

leases with credits; Over 15,000 Titles of pictures released since 1915; List of players and their agents' telephone numbers; Birthdays and Birthplaces of motion picture people; Complete list of theatres; Financial data on leading companies; Court Decisions of 1935; Personnel of companies and organizations; Comprehensive exploitation section; Equipment Buying Guide; Complete Foreign Section; List of Theatre Circuits; Original Titles of Books and Plays; Work of Players, Directors, Writers, Cameramen; Names and addresses of Producers, Distributors, etc; Ten Best Pictures of last 14 years, and 1001 other items of useful information.

\* \* \*

It is quite understandable that a romance should run all the way through a picture, but I am growing tired of the injection of quarrels between the lovers as a device to prolong it. You see it in many pictures, silly squabbles with at least one of the parties to each being so palpably in the wrong no audience could believe in its sincerity. Screen writers should be able to think up something more to their credit than a boy and girl shouting insults at one another merely to assure a picture sufficient footage.

\* \* \*

A prominent producer at lunch the other day told me the reason oldtime favorites of the silent days are not in demand now is that they have not adapted themselves to the talkie medium. That is rather wierd' reasoning. It was the oldtimers' adaptability to the silent medium that made the film industry a gigantic one. The medium was the strength of the industry and the actors served it in-

*(Continued on page 34)*

Happy Birthday . . . from

A FRIEND

In recognition of his estimate of The Spectator's value to motion pictures

HENRY BLANKE

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

WARNER BROS.

e

ALBERT LEWIS

©

PRODUCER—PARAMOUNT

John W. Considine Jr.

Producing for

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

BRYAN FOY

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

WARNER BROS.



# The New York Spectacle

By  
Betsy Beaton

New York, April 6.

CAN nothing be done about the sudden music that starts up when love scenes appear on the screen? The crashing chords of Ravel, the weird intricacies of Debussy, the mellow discords of Stravinsky and the tonal flight of Respighi should occupy a very important place in the pictures of today. In fact, I feel that music should accompany every every mood of every picture. It need never be obvious or intrude itself, but it should always be there. On the other hand, the music that starts up softly only when the hero and heroine are in each others presence, is unnecessary finger pointing. Instead of augmenting the tenderness of the scene in question and adding sentimental overtones, it challenges us to be moved, and we refuse.

The field of symphonic music in the cinema has only been touched on the surface. The Hecht and MacArthur picture, *The Scoundrel*, went further than any of its predecessors. The somber and majestic composition of Rachmaninoff's, *The Isle of the Dead*, was used throughout the picture and the famed painting by Arnold Bocklin, which was Rachmaninoff's inspiration for the music, was used as the background on which the title of the picture was flashed. The tie-up was complete.

Those who are familiar with this piece and who have seen the picture will never forget the scene in the publisher's office after he has been reported killed in an airplane crash on his way to Bermuda. His secretary and partner are amazed to find him sitting at his desk, as no one has seen him enter the room. It is after he leaves them that they become aware of the piece of wet seaweed on the publisher's desk. The idea of the seaweed was not so terrifying in itself, but the strange and discordant run of music that followed their discovery of it, sent a terrible chill through the audience and aroused the first suspicion of something supernatural.

I cannot help but admire whoever was responsible for utilizing this particular run of music so cleverly that it became a part of the script. Indeed, the whole of the picture was one with the music and when the music was not creating a mood of its own without benefit of dialogue, it was a soft insinuating background. On the other hand, when music underlines only a few scenes in a picture, principally the love scenes, it is apt to have an effect contrary to the one intended.

The painting by Arnold Bocklin of the woman garbed in white taking her husband to the "Isle of the Dead," and its musical counterpart by Rachmaninoff, had been known to me before I saw this picture of Hecht and MacArthur, but it is because of their understanding of the function music should have in the cinema that the values of both the musical composition and of the painting have been enhanced for me.

\* \* \*

The success of the play *Boy Meets Girl*, another parody at the expense of motion pictures, is old stuff now in New York. It is grand fun, and its two Hecht and MacArthur playboys who motivate the plot are still the talk

of the town. In one sequence it shows how the moribund box-office pull of a cowboy star is revived by the expedient of having the hulking hero find an abandoned babe out in the prairie and adopt it. The amiable public increased by millions of maternalists (and decreased, we suppose, by millions of small boys holding their noses). Hollywood's sportsmanlike answer to the jibe is seen in the M.G.M. picture *Three Godfathers*, with Lewis Stone and Chester Morris, wherein this very thesis is used with great effectiveness. The picture dragged in spots, and lacked cohesion, yet the spirit which moved the Peter B. Kyne story on which it is based, is there. At moments the program picture rose to heights that at the same time revealed great depths. A scene in which Lewis Stone, who can go no further in the desert for lack of water and decides to shoot himself, quotes Macbeth before finishing his life, was a surprising jewel set against a mediocre background. Other scenes that stood out gave one the same impression. I could not help but feel that if the hokum which was potioned to the audiences had been given in smaller doses, the picture would have been great. It is saddening and irritating at the same time to see a picture come so close and miss. But now and then in this picture a scene of surpassing irony and philosophical profundity was seen. I liked *Three Godfathers*, and on the whole was deeply touched by it.

\* \* \*

Why is it that a great number of actors and actresses quaintly name their offspring Peter or Michael or Anthony? . . . Pennsylvania under flood conditions was interesting, if hazardous. Our hotel lobby in Wilkes-Barre was under water half an hour after we had contrived to leave town. Seeing a news-reel event at first hand and on the spot, was exciting, but there was a continual annoying ringing in our ears which we discovered, on giving heed to its insistence, to be the voice of Graham MacNamee. . . . The first real day of spring came on the twenty-third of March, and it gave one a sense of excitement to see the open-air busses coming once more into their own.

\* \* \*

New York and London have traded their second-year hit shows. We gave the British *Three Men On A Horse* and they gave us *Love On The Dole*. Both have been taken enthusiastically. . . . Reginald Bach, who both directed and plays in *Love On The Dole*, is a most interesting person and while speaking with him the other evening I learned that *Outward Bound*, which with *Berkeley Square* is the most famous play of its kind, was first written as a farce. It hardly seems believable. . . . Boris Karloff, in my mind, has been relegated to the ranks of those who are kindly, sad, a little futile and never frightened. . . . The Dionne Quintuplets look slightly dissipated. . . . As we look over the headlines which greet us at the breakfast table and ponder on all the strikes, strife and stridency that weigh us mortals down, we are reminded of the remark which Aldous Huxley, in *Point Counter Point*, gives one of his characters to say: "How do we know that this world isn't some other planet's Hell?"

FRANK LLOYD



HENRY KING

DIRECTED

THE COUNTRY DOCTOR

20th CENTURY - FOX

Clarence Brown

DIRECTOR

.

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

to the Spectator



HARRY D'ARRAST

# Looking at the Latest

## Entirely Satisfactory

I MARRIED A DOCTOR, First National. Directed by Archie Mayo; assistant director, Frank Shaw; screen play by Casey Robinson; adapted from MAIN STREET, by Sinclair Lewis; dramatized by Harriet Ford and Harvey O'Higgins; photography by Byron Haskin; film editor, Owen Marks; art director, Carl Jules Weyl; supervisor, Harry Joe Brown. Cast: Pat O'Brien, Josephine Hutchinson, Ross Alexander, Guy Kibbee, Louise Fazenda, Olin Howland, Margaret Irving, Alma Lloyd, Grace Stafford, Ray Mayer, Robert Barrat, Hedwiga Reicher, Willard Robertson, Edith Elliott, Thomas Pogue, Janet Young, Harry Hayden, Frank Rhodes, Gaby Fay, Sam Wren, Dora Clement.

ARCHIE MAYO has given us in this one a picture that can take its place beside his *Petrified Forest* to which he gave such distinguished direction. *I Married a Doctor* is a beautifully directed production. By the brisk manner in which it moves along without at any time indicating that it is in a greater hurry than the self-satisfied town which is its locale, we can judge of the excellence of the screen play which Casey Robinson wrote from *Main Street*, by Sinclair Lewis.

The screen—if you pause to think of it—is an extraordinary art. It, so to speak, skips through a book, pauses here and there to touch something on a page, brings its characters to life, and in a little over an hour makes us feel we know intimately all the people who are just names in the book. So sincerely has Mayo directed the material provided him by Robinson, so human has he made the people, so logical their reaction to the situations in which they find themselves, I feel I could stroll down Main Street this morning and call scores of people by their first names.

When a picture can do that to me, it, to me at least, is a good picture.

The story derives its strength from its commonness. As individuals its people are uninteresting, just a run-of-the-mill, smalltown, narrowminded, gossipy group, with nothing to distinguish its members as human specimens. But so adroitly and authentically is their community life depicted, their interrelationship established and their personal idiosyncracies brought out, their petty affairs, their complacent smugness, their narrow range of thinking, the picture becomes a graphic human document that holds our close attention throughout its showing.

Pat O'Brien never before gave such a sincere, restrained and intelligent performance on the screen. He makes it logical that such a man should be such a favorite in such a community. His reaction to his domestic unhappiness, which reaches its peak when his wife leaves him, compels our warm sympathy. And so competently and feelingly is the wife played by Josephine Hutchinson that no one else could be imagined in the part.

These two outstanding performances are matched in quality, not in length or importance, by more than a dozen others. Hal Wallis and Harry Joe Brown, his lieutenant in charge of the production, assembled one of the strongest casts ever provided a picture. Three of the players are entrusted with Swedish characterizations. The appearance of Louise Fazenda is not, as is usually the

case, a signal for laughter. She has a serious role which she plays so thoughtfully and impressively that it makes me hope that more such parts will be assigned to her. I am not an authority on Swedish dialect, but Miss Fazenda's sounds authentic, as does also that of Robert Barrat who plays a dramatic role in a masterly manner. The third Swede is Ray Mayer. He registers strongly, making a brilliant contribution to the feast of excellent acting. Ross Alexander has an important part as an impressionable young fellow whose artistic inclinations make him a misfit on his father's farm and among the smug townspeople with whom he comes in contact. He plays it admirably. Willard Robertson, an excellent actor whom we do not see often enough, is another who distinguishes himself. And to Hedwiga Reicher goes credit for a small part raised to importance by her superb portrayal.

Byron Haskin's photography is a strong factor in making the production so satisfactory. There are many scenes which his camera makes pictorially impressive.

Warner Brothers have mounted the picture with the completeness we have learned to expect from them. They have been responsible for a series of notable contributions to Hollywood's recent output of screen entertainment. None from their studio or from any other ranks higher in artistic merit, human feeling or entertainment value than *I Married a Doctor*. Its down-to-earthness gives it universal appeal, sets it apart from the flow of sophisticated story material which producers try so hard to make entertaining.

## Capra Scores Again

MR. DEEDS GOES TO TOWN, Columbia. Story, Clarence Budington Kelland; screen play, Robert Riskin; director, Frank Capra; assistant director, C. C. Coleman; photography, Joseph Walker, A.S.C.; film editor, Gene Havlick; musical director, Howard Jackson; art director, Stephen Goosson; special camera effects, E. Roy Davidson; costumes, Samuel Lange; sound engineer, Edward Bernds. Cast: Gary Cooper, Jean Arthur, George Bancroft, Lionel Stander, Douglass Dumbrille, Raymond Walburn, H. B. Warner, Ruth Donnelly, Walter Catlett, John Wray, Margaret Matzenauer, Warren Hymer, Muriel Evans, Spencer Charters, Emma Dunn, Arthur Hoyt, Christian Rub, Jameson Thomas, Mayo Methot, Gustav von Seyffertitz.

JUST another of those cinematic masterpieces we have been led to expect from Frank Capra when given a script he and Robert Riskin have put on paper. I regret that Frank in each production is showing a more marked trend toward dialogue as his medium of expression. *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* is definitely a talkie, but it is a brilliant one and capital entertainment. It is notable, however, that its outstanding scenes get their strength from the camera.

When Gary Cooper, a small-town boy, is informed he has inherited twenty million dollars, he keeps on playing his tuba; and we see him again playing his beloved instrument in the village band which has marched to the depot to bid him farewell as he leaves for New York to take possession of his fortune. In perhaps a dozen other places in the picture the camera steps to the front for brief mo-

GENE  
MARKEY

20th Century-Fox

*Best Wishes*



WILLIAM K. HOWARD

*Hamilton*  
*MacFadden*

COMPLIMENTS OF



EDWARD  
LUDWIG

ments to take possession of the story, and in such scenes Capra's direction is so effective it makes one regret that the burden had not been shifted more often from dialogue to photography.

The story is a deeply human one with a sound psychological basis. That is its strength. Superficially it is almost farcical, highly hilarious scenes following one another in quick succession, but underneath it all is a serious thought. A decent, clear-thinking, unspoiled and experienced young American is taken from the quiet of the village in which he was born, given great riches, and thrown among the wolves and jackals who lurk in cities and hunt in packs. In this instance the chase is not successful, as the young fellow has a philosophy of his own, an elemental conception of right and wrong which carries him through to final triumph.

\* \* \*

Some inspired touches make Capra's direction a rare treat to the beholder. There is a love scene on the steps of a house on a foggy night, the setting being unattractive, totally lacking in romantic significance, yet for tenderness, beauty and emotional value Cooper's avowal of love for Jean Arthur takes its place among the great moments in motion pictures. I am sorry, however, that Capra and Riskin saw fit so quickly to change the picture's mood by showing Gary running out of the scene and falling over obstacles in the street. It was not a place for laughs. It was all right to have Gary beat a retreat, an action consistent with his character, but as the atmosphere created by the scene had been one pleasant for the audience to linger in, Mack Sennett technique should not have been resorted to to take it rudely out of it.

But the production is too rich in virtues to be harmed greatly by a couple of minor faults. It is a credit to all those who had a part in its making. Columbia spared no expense in giving it an appropriate setting, Stephen Goossen's art direction being in every way commendable. Joseph Walker's photography is excellent, some night shots being particularly effective.

\* \* \*

In no department is Capra's direction greater than it is revealed in the performances of all the members of the long cast. One easily can understand why even our most prominent players are eager to appear in a Capra picture. Frank allows his people to be natural. There never is any acting in front of the camera when he is standing behind it. I have liked Gary Cooper every time I have seen him on the screen. His lack of stage training is the strength of his picture performances. Under Capra's sympathetic handling he appears to better advantage than ever before. His performance is brilliant.

It was quite early in the life of the SPECTATOR that from time to time it had things in it about an ambitious girl who wanted to get somewhere on the screen. Every time I reviewed a picture in which Jean Arthur appeared I wrote again that she had a future. In *Deeds* she makes good all the pleasant things I said about her, but it is Hollywood's fault, not hers, that it took so long for my prophecies to come true. She is an admirable little actress.

George Bancroft surprised me with the excellence of his performance. When he was starring for Paramount he became quite hammy, acting all over the place at the

slightest opportunity. In *Deeds* he gives a really intelligent performance. I see no reason why he should not become a box-office asset again. I am sorry Lionel Stander has such an unpleasant voice. I like him as an actor and can stand a little of his talking, but too much of it makes his voice get on my nerves.

Douglass Dumbrille is an effective heavy. One of the finest scenes in the picture is a bit of acting done by John Wray, the only scene which drew applause from all sections of the big preview audience. H. B. Warner, Jameson Thomas, Gustav von Seyfertz, Raymond Walburn—but if I keep on naming those who add strength to the picture, I merely will reproduce the list you will find at the head of this review.

By all means see *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. It is entitled to a place on your list of those you must not miss.

### *Dialogue Poorly Directed*

13 HOURS BY AIR, Paramount. Producer, E. Lloyd Sheldon; director, Mitchell Leisen; assistant director, Edgar Anderson; from a story by Rogart Rogers and Frank Mitchell Dazey; screen play, Bogart Rogers; adaptation, Kenyon Nicholson; sound, M. M. Paggi; film editor, Doane Harrison; art directors, Hans Dreier and John Goodman; photographer, Theodor Sparkuhl, A.S.C. Cast: Fred MacMurray, Joan Bennett, Zasu Pitts, Alan Baxter, Fred Keating, Brian Donlevy, John Howard, Adrienne Marden, Ruth Donnelly, Bennie Bartlett, Grace Bradley Dean Jagger, Jack Mulhall, Granville Bates, Arthur Singley, Clyde Dison, Mildred Stone.

MITCHELL LEISEN had everything to work with when he started this picture, an interesting script, a capable cast and a scenic background with great pictorial possibilities, but it comes out just an ordinary class B production because of the stolid direction given it. Its most glaring weakness is the manner in which the dialogue is spoken. Most of the lines merely are parroted. What should be tender utterances by Fred MacMurray to Joan Bennett are spoken in the same tone in which MacMurray asks an airport dispatcher how the weather is ahead. There are many intimate scenes in the film, but not one intimate conversation. Leisen apparently acts on the presumption that what is said in a two-shot close-up cannot be heard by a character previously planted as being seated within a couple of feet of the camera line.

\* \* \*

The majority of pictures we have been getting of late reveal a growing appreciation on the part of directors of the fact that screen actors should talk to one another and not to the audience. The day of players howling at one another is definitely over, but still there is much room for improvement in the reading of lines. The screen is the most intimate of all the arts, and screen dialogue derives its strength from the degree of intimacy in which it is delivered. *Thirteen Hours By Air* has everything in it to make it a gripping drama, but it lacks conviction and becomes monotonous by virtue of the manner in which the dialogue is directed.

And there is too much dialogue in it. Its story is one that could have been told more effectively if a greater burden of its telling had been entrusted to the camera. It starts at the Newark airport, goes aboard a plane and ends in San Francisco, thereby possessing physical progression that in itself is pure cinema. It contains beautiful photography by Theodor Sparkuhl, striking shots of

DAVID BUTLER

DIRECTED

CAPTAIN JANUARY

20th CENTURY-FOX

JOHN STAHL

DIRECTOR

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

ROBERT  
FLOREY

DIRECTING

FOR

PARAMOUNT

RICHARD THORPE

DIRECTED

THE VOICE OF BUGLE ANN

FOR

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

planes in flight against backgrounds of billowing clouds, but the story itself is told entirely in dialogue.

The person or persons responsible for the process shots can be credited with performing some outstanding feats. There is real thrill in a sequence in which the audience, so to speak, is riding inside a plane which seems destined to crash. The peril of the moment is reflected in the facial expressions of the two pilots, MacMurray and John Howard. In this scene the camera comes into its own and Leisen's direction is splendid. Not a word is spoken, and never in any picture have I seen a story being carried forward more dramatically than it is by the strained expressions on the faces and in the eyes of the two young actors. That one sequence makes the entire picture worthwhile.

Poor Zazu Pitts! One of the really great actresses of the screen, its greatest potential tragedienne if she were permitted to be one, here we have her again as merely a nuisance making heroic attempts to lessen the dramatic power of the story by causing laughter where none should be. Joan Bennett, for years my number one screen love, is her captivating and intelligent self in a romantic role. Fred Keating, Brian Donlevy, Alan Baxter, Bennie Bartlett and Ruth Donnelly give good performances. Marie Prevost, not mentioned in the cast, does an illuminating bit, as does also Jack Mulhall.

### *Good One from England*

**BORN FOR GLORY**, Gaumont-British production and release. Features John Mills, Betty Balfour, Barry Mackay, Jimmy Hanley. Directed by Walter Forde; story by C. S. Forester; adaptation by J. O. C. Orton, Michael Hogan and Gerard Fairlie; camera, Bernard Knowles.

**B**ECAUSE it is British made and lacks a cast bristling with names familiar to American audiences, *Born For Glory* probably will be given short shift by our exhibitors. If shown at all it will be presented as the unimportant half of a dual bill, yet it is one of the most stirring bits of screen entertainment I have seen in a long, long time. It was produced on an ambitious scale by Gaumont-British and admirably directed by Walter Forde. It will not fail to hold the closest attention of the most discriminating audience that views it.

The story is one of naval heroism by an English boy who makes the supreme sacrifice for his country. It is told with directness and mounting drama, with maneuvering warships and the roar of mighty guns, but it never loses sight of the human element, never allows us to forget the boy who is the object of our greatest interest. The personal narrative weaves its way through an historic episode in the World War and makes the episode important only as something affecting the fate of the gallant young Englishman.

The camera plays the leading part. To it is entrusted the telling of the greater portion of the story, thus making *Born For Glory* more nearly a true motion picture than any Hollywood production of late has managed to be. It has an air of authenticity that few pictures possess. The audience is placed in ringside seats at a naval battle, the crashing scenes being composed to develop the maximum dramatic value and a startling impression of intimacy. In these sequences Forde's direction is notable and the photography excellent.

The picture wisely interests us first in its intimate personal phase. We witness the first meeting of Betty Balfour and Barry Mackay who later become the parents of John Mills, the hero of the story. The interest shifts to the boy as we follow him through naval training and onto the ship which subsequently is sunk by a German raider. Thereafter it is a stark story of heroic deeds far removed from the main arena in which the nations of the world grappled, just a fragment of the war settling its own fate far away from where greater masses were struggling.

The picture itself does not exert itself to be heroic. We are not conscious that anyone is acting. The players go about their given business in a matter-of-fact way, accepting its hazards as ordinary parts of ship routine, as merely the thing one naturally would do under the circumstances. On the German ship we hear only German spoken, which heightens the impression that we are looking at something real and not at something staged for the pleasure of an audience.

Gaumont-British does not present *Born For Glory* as one of its big pictures, but rather as one to take its place beside our own class B productions. If Hollywood made one with as great dramatic power and scenic sweep, it would sprinkle it with Clark Gables and call it an epic.

### *Janet Gaynor Adorns It*

**SMALL TOWN GIRL**, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Directed by William A. Wellman; produced by Hunt Stromberg; screen play by John Lee Mahin and Edith Fitzgerald; from the book by Ben Ames Williams; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Arnold Gillespie and Edwin B. Willis; wardrobe by Dolly Tree; photographed by Charles Rosher, A.S.C.; film editor, Blanche Sewell; assistant director, Tom Andre. Cast: Janet Gaynor, Robert Taylor, Binnie Barnes, Lewis Stone, Andy Devine, Elizabeth Patterson, Frank Craven, James Stewart, Douglas Fowley, Isabel Jewell, Charley Grapewin, Nella Walker, Robert Greig, Edgar Kennedy, Willie Fung.

**B**EN AMES WILLIAMS is not one of the authors I happen to read. Once I started to, and went only far enough to assure me I was in a field which only love-sick damsels should explore. I thought it a trivial sort of thing, one of false reactions to unsound situations. Unless I am mistaken, the story I refused to follow past the establishment of its theme, is the one Hunt Stromberg, out at Metro, selected for Janet Gaynor's new picture, *Small Town Girl*. I cannot recall the name of the book I started.

After seeing the picture, I still think the story is a trivial one. But on the screen I saw the boy and girl doing the things the book did not convince me they would do. There was no doubt about it—they were doing them. The boy got drunk, married the girl, and next morning was surprised to find he had done so. The girl, whose name the boy did not know, knew what she was doing. Hard things, these, to justify in a book one reads only with fleeting curiosity.

But when all of it is put in a well written script, produced as a picture by Hunt Stromberg, directed by William Wellman, with Janet Gaynor as the girl—well, it makes a lot of difference. I have written frequently that the screen is a better medium than the stage for the presentation of plays, grand operas and musical comedies.

Arthur Hornblow Jr.

PRODUCER  
PARAMOUNT

JACK  
CUNNINGHAM

SUPERVISING  
WITH PARAMOUNT

JAMES HOGAN

Directed  
Desert Gold

PARAMOUNT

COMPLIMENTS OF

Harold B. Franklin



*Small Town Girl* convinces me it is a better medium than a book for the presentation of a romance. What a book impresses on our minds only through our concentration on what we read, the camera depicts on the screen for us to get merely by looking at it. No mental concentration is necessary to our getting all its values. Our eyes make us conscious of them.

The first requisite to our acceptance of a romance which has its inception in a drunken escapade, is the justification of the girl's part in it. This the picture does completely. On her first appearance we sense that Janet does not belong in the atmosphere that pervades her home and her daily contacts, the deadly routine of her family life, the coarseness of her brother-in-law, the poor wit of the gawky youth in love with her and marriage to whom will be her inevitable destiny if she remains at home and lets fate run its unchecked course. We see in her eyes her justifiable discontent, and it awakens our sympathy until we want her to chuck it all, to thumb her nose at her chafing shackles and go venturing into the world at large. So when she does just that, we applaud her. And the premise of the story is established to our satisfaction.

\* \* \*

I can recall no performance since her Diane in *Seventh Heaven* so entirely praiseworthy as that which Janet contributes to *Small Town Girl*. Under Wellman's expert and sympathetic direction she portrays the part without any suggestion of acting. And never since her unforgettable first appearance have her eyes told so much of her story, mirrored so graphically the emotions which stirred her. I have seen her give so many indifferent performances that I had accepted her as a waning star, but again I regard her as a really accomplished actress. The part gives her an opportunity to reveal the wide range of her emotional power; she plays it with intelligent restraint, and never before has she appeared more beautiful on the screen than she does in all but a few shots in which a combination of lighting and make-up gives a dead-white effect which lessens her attractiveness.

There is something in Robert Taylor's performance, some intangible element I could not put a name to, which makes me wonder if he is going as far as most of us have been thinking he would. It seemed to be a mixture of cocksureness and a feeling that Bob Taylor was more important than Bob Dakin, the person he was playing. But whatever it was, the performance did not impress me as sincere. Taylor can go a long way on his good looks, but only sincerity can take him the rest of the journey.

\* \* \*

James Stewart will be our next picture sensation. Lacking good looks and having nothing but sincerity, this young fellow soon will be challenging Shirley Temple's right to her place at the top of the list of box-office favorites. His part in this picture is not large, but any part he plays is made important by the manner in which he plays it.

Lewis Stone has a standard of excellence which he never does anything to lower. He and Nella Walker play Taylor's parents impressively. That funny Chinaman, Willie Fung, again demonstrates his right to recognition as one of our really capable actors. Andy Devine and Isabel Jewel also show to good advantage, as does Binnie Barnes as the girl Taylor intended to marry.

Four people were credited on the screen with having prepared the screen play, but I find only two on the list of credits the studio supplies, John Lee Mahin and Edith Fitzgerald. Anyway, it was a good job. Charles Rosher's photography was up to his own high standard, but I would like to know why Janet was so white in some of her scenes. Will Charlie please call me up?

I will not excuse Bill Wellman for one bit of direction. Taylor and Binnie Barnes carry on a conversation while dancing. It is of such intimate nature that two such well bred characters would not dream of carrying it on in tones loud enough to be heard by all the other dancers on the floor. Yet they do it. Whether it originated in the script or was a directorial brain child, it is inexcusably stupid screen technique. As always is the case, a scene of this sort would be much more impressive if the players left the dance floor, sought a secluded spot and conversed in low tones.

### *Rather Illogical Story*

THE UNGUARDED HOUR, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Directed by Sam Wood; produced by Lawrence Weingarten; screen play by Howard Emmett Rogers and Leon Gordon; based on the play THE UNGUARDED HOUR, by Ladislaus Fodor; musical score by Dr. William Axt; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Joseph Wright and Edwin B. Willis; wardrobe by Dolly Tree; photographed by James Van Trees, A.S.C.; film editor, Frank E. Hull; assistant director, Charles Dorian. Cast: Loretta Young, Franchot Tone, Lewis Stone, Roland Young, Jessie Ralph, Dudley Digges, Henry Daniell, Robert Greig, E. E. Clive, Wallis Clark, John Buckler, Aileen Pringle.

THIS picture brings two popular people back to us and each contributes a great deal to it to heighten the pleasure their return gives us. Loretta Young, after a long siege of poor health, never looked better than she does in *The Unguarded Hour*. She has given bigger, more dynamic characterizations, but never a more intelligent or impressive one than that of the wife of Franchot Tone in this story laid in Mayfair and the criminal courts of London. The other wanderer who has returned is Roland Young, and if he was present at the preview he must have been gratified by the burst of applause with which his presence on the screen was greeted.

Young gives an admirable performance. It is a comedy characterization with a background of loyalty and deep concern for the welfare of his closest friends, Loretta and Tone, and Young plays it with understanding and conviction, without slighting any of its comedy values. Dudley Digges makes outstanding a powerfully emotional role, and Henry Daniell gives us a scoundrel who makes deviltry fascinating. Lewis Stone, Jessie Ralph and E. E. Clive also are entitled to praise.

Franchot Tone is to me one of the most pleasing actors on the screen, but he is handicapped in *Unguarded Hour* by the unconvincing role he is given to play. He struggles manfully to make a good story out of a poor one. The picture's assets are a pictorially impressive production well up to Metro's high standard, its strong cast and Sam Wood's capable direction; its liability an illogical story.

A minor fault is the disposition of Loretta Young and Tone, every time they come within clutching distance, to go into a clinch and breathe "dearests!" and "darlings!" down one another's necks until we strongly suspect they

HOWARD  
EMMETT  
ROGERS

*extends*

Birthday Greetings

*Sonya Levien*

SCREEN PLAY

THE COUNTRY DOCTOR

20th CENTURY-FOX

CHARLES  
FURTHMAN

WRITER - PRODUCER

GEORGE  
BRICKER

WRITING FOR  
WARNER'S

love one another. But Loretta's love is not strong enough to prompt her to take her husband into her confidence when she becomes the victim of a blackmailer. Nor does she yield to it until the last minute to relieve the tortured mind of a man on trial for his life.

In England, as well as in this country, a man is presumed to be innocent until his guilt is proven. As much as we see of the murder trial in *Unguarded Hour* gives us the impression that Tone, as crown prosecutor, seeks to hang a man, not because the crown can prove him guilty, but because the prisoner cannot produce a witness to prove his innocence.

One of Tone's closest friends is Lewis Stone, head of Scotland Yard, yet Tone does not take Stone into his confidence when he stages a melodramatic confession that he committed the murder, his purpose being the uncovering of the real murderer. Altogether it is an absurd story, and for none of its absurdity do I blame the writers of the script, Howard Emmett Rogers and Leon Gordon, each of whom has many well written scripts to his credit. The weakness of the story originates in the play from which the picture was made. If the wife, for instance, had confided in her husband there would have been no story; if the wife, the missing witness, had appeared at once in defense of the man charged with murder there would have been no story, and if Tone had taken Stone into his confidence, again there would have been no story. The writers of the screen play, therefore, deserve sympathy, not censure.

However, if you check your analytical sense at the box-office before going in, you may get some satisfaction out of it. I did.

### One You Must See

THE MOON'S OUR HOME, a Walter Wanger production for Paramount release. Directed by William A. Seiter; screen play by Isabel Dawn and Boyce DeGaw; additional dialogue by Dorothy Parker and Alan Compbell; original by Faith Baldwin; art direction, Alexander Toluboff; photographed by Joseph A. Valentine, A.S.C.; costumes by Helen Taylor; musical direction, Boris Morros; recorded by Hugo Grenzbach; assistant director, James Hartnett. Cast: Margaret Sullavan, Henry Fonda, Charles Butterworth, Beulah Bondi, Walter Brennan, Henrietta Crosman, Dorothy Stickney, Margaret Hamilton, Lucien Littlefield, Brandon Hurst, Spencer Charters, John G. Spacey, Margaret Fielding, Corbett Morris, Thelma White, Antoinette Lees.

BOY meets girl, they drift apart, meet again, marry—a story done on the screen a thousand times, and the fact that it will be done a thousand more times supports the SPECTATOR's contention that the story from which it is made is not a matter of great importance to a motion picture. In the case of *The Moon's Our Home* the moment we see the names of Margaret Sullavan and Henry Fonda coupled in the main title, we know they are going to meet, fall in love, marry. But it is not the mission of the screen to strive to tell us a new story in each picture. There are no new stories.

When Walter Wanger set about the production of this picture, all he had to do was to make us want the story to turn out as it does, to make us like Margaret and Henry, and make their marriage the logical outcome of all that transpires between their meeting and the ceremony. As we know the answer before the picture starts, the pro-

ducer's job is to satisfy us that it is the right answer. That applies to all motion pictures, as, in fact, it does to all stories, whether told on the screen, on the stage or in printed words.

And Walter has done his job well. *The Moon's Our Home* is as entertaining as one could wish it to be—one of the brightest comedies we have had in a long time. It has been given an exceedingly smart and complete production, the sets and locations themselves having more than usual story value. Alexander Toluboff has provided artistic and appropriate interiors, and nature contributes some sweeping settings which the camera of Joseph A. Valentine converts into scenes of pictorial glamour. The gowns designed by Helen Taylor add greatly to the beauty of the production.

\* \* \*

Mrs. Spectator, who read Faith Baldwin's story, tells me the screen play of Isabel Dawn and Boyce DeGaw adheres closely to it. Certainly it provides the players with a wealth of comedy values which they realize in a scintillating manner, for which credit is due both to them and to William Seiter, who has given the picture brilliant direction. His handling of the dialogue is particularly effective. He gives us conversations, not forensic debates which make so many pictures unconvincing.

Margaret Sullavan proves herself a great trouper. She wallows in snowdrifts, has a rough-and-tumble fight with Fonda, yells her head off when her scenes demand it, and generally conducts herself with physical vigor that is captivating. She is equally at home in the mental phases of her role, giving one of the most appealing and amusing characterizations the screen has shown us of late. Fonda is well cast opposite her. He, also, gets inside his role and gives a notable performance.

To give individual credit to all who deserve it would be merely to repeat the names of the members of the cast. There is not a weak spot in it. If you overlook *The Moon's Our Home*, you will deny yourself a treat.

### A Very Neat Job

TILL WE MEET AGAIN, Paramount. Producer, Albert Lewis; director, Robert Florey; assistant director, Harry Scott; from a play by Alfred Davis; as adapted by Morton Bartheaux; screen play, Edwin Justus Mayer, Brian Marlow and Franklin Coen; sound, H. M. Lindgren; film editor, Richard Currier; art directors, Hans Dreier and Roland Anderson; photographer, Victor Milner, A.S.C. Cast: Herbert Marshall, Gertrude Michael, Lionel Atwill, Rod La Rocque, Guy Bates Post, Spencer Charters, Frank Reicher, Egon Brecher, Torben Meyer, Vallejo Gantner, Colin Tapley, Colin Kenny, Julia Faye.

THIS picture is one of Paramount's class B offerings, not one of the big productions upon which the studio brain concentrates, such a big one, for instance, as *Give Us This Night*, with the established names of Kiepura and Swarthout to attract box-office patronage—just a little one so unimportant that Albert Lewis no doubt was left alone while engaged in making it, the only studio requisite being that he should shoot it within schedule and keep it within budget. And if Paramount this season or next does not make a picture less genuinely entertaining than *Till We Meet Again*, it can go up to the attic, blow the dust off its slogan and display it once

WALDEMAR  
YOUNG

UNDER CONTRACT TO

PARAMOUNT

LAIRD  
DOYLE

UNDER CONTRACT TO

Warner Bros.

*F. Hugh Herbert*

Under Contract to

WARNER BROS.

CHARLES KENYON

- "A Midsummer Night's Dream"  
*(Screen Play in Collaboration)*
- "A Girl from 10th Avenue"  
*(Adaptation and Screen Play)*
- "The Goose and the Gander"  
*(Original Story and Screen Play)*
- "Petriified Forest"  
*(Screen Play in Collaboration)*

does the stream of chatter cease. The story belongs solely to the stage, where under the title, *The Home-Towners*, it achieved success. It is out of place on the screen and will not be a success as a film. Leaving the theatre where it was previewed, I heard several spectators voice their disapproval of the enormous amount of dialogue, as a result of which, I gather, the offering had not pleased them. The cinema is an art form that should be nine-tenths pictorial. Incessant talking in it is out of place.

I do not recall having seen another picture directed by William McGann. From the standpoint of stage technique, his direction is splendid. No blame for the absence of a cinematic display, considering the material given him, goes to McGann. I hope his next script will permit the inclusion of true cinema and that he will take advantage of the opportunity. Credited with the good photography is L. W. O'Connell.

### Good One from Radio

THE WITNESS CHAIR, RKO-Radio picture. Associate producer, Cliff Reid; director, George Nicholls, Jr.; screen play, Rian James and Gertrude Purcell; story, Rita Weiman; photographer, Robert de Grasse; sound recorder, George D. Ellis; assistant director, Kenneth Holmes; musical director, Roy Webb. Cast: Ann Harding, Walter Abel, Douglass Dumbrille, Frances Sage, Moroni Olsen, Margaret Hamilton, Maxine Jennings, William Benedict, Paul Harvey, Murray Kinnell, Charles Arnt, Frank Jenks, Fred Kelsey, Edward LeSaint, Hilda Vaughn and Barlow Borland.

Reviewed by ALLAN HERSHOLT

**A** LOGICAL and interesting courtroom drama, presented skilfully, this is recommended without reservation. The direction reveals fine taste, sound knowledge of cinematic art and entertainment; the players are altogether convincing; the scripting is of high order and the photography effective.

The opening scenes present a good display of silent-cinema, showing us the actions of Ann Harding after she, a secretary, has murdered Douglass Dumbrille, her employer. From George Nicholls, Jr., the production has received one of the smoothest directorial jobs of recent months. It is the kind of direction that is good because in not one scene does it give evidence of attempting to draw attention to itself. Nicholls has realized all the possibilities of the camera in telling his story, giving us much photographic effectiveness. He has handled characters in an intelligent manner, presenting them naturally at all times, with admirable regard for both drama and pictorial composition. Voice modulation, which has much to do with sustaining the illusion of reality that a sound-film must create, is fine here. *Witness Chair* is a talking motion picture which comes as near to perfection of treatment as any offered by the screen of late.

Rian James and Gertrude Purcell have created the screen play from Rita Weiman's story and are to be credited with work that is superb and demonstrates the wisdom of assigning screen writers to write screen plays.

Again the magnificent Ann Harding gives a characterization that will delight spectators who find pleasure in viewing fine acting. She has invested her role with an aura of realism, living the character during her every moment before the camera. The deep understanding, poignant feeling, artistic conception and dramatic expres-

sion revealed in her work give new strength to my belief that she is an actress of greatness. In her amazing career, she has shown herself as a player of limitless possibilities, one capable of comedy, drama, tragedy, one with few peers. She is a dramatic spendthrift. She spends everything—her mind, her soul, her beauty—on her art. And the more she spends, the richer she becomes.

In *Witness Chair*, Miss Harding has fine support. Young Bill Benedict's characterization of the office boy does much toward making the film enjoyable. It is a piece of work that will win for him many admirers. Frances Sage, new to me, displays excellent dramatic ability. Walter Abel's portrayal is his best on celluloid. Moroni Olsen, Douglass Dumbrille, Frank Jenks, Fred Kelsey, Maxine Jennings, Margaret Hamilton, Murray Kinnell and Paul Harvey are outstanding.

Cameraman Robert de Grass has accomplished excellent results. *Witness Chair* is a picture of which Cliff Reid, producer, has reason to feel proud.

### Direction and Acting Save It

ABSOLUTE QUIET, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Directed by George B. Seitz; produced by John W. Considine, Jr.; screen play by Harry Clork; from the story by George F. Worts; musical score by Franz Waxman; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, James Havens and Edwin B. Willis; wardrobe by Dolly Tree; photographed by Lester White, A.S.C.; film editor, Conral A. Nervig; assistant director, Robert Barnes. Cast: Lionel Atwill, Irene Hervey, Raymond Walburn, Stuart Erwin, Ann Loring, Louis Hayward, Wallace Ford, Bernadene Hayes, Robert Gleckler, Harvey Stephens, J. Carrol Naish, Matt Moore, Robert Livingston.

Reviewed by ALLAN HERSHOLT

**T**HE chances of a picture do not rest so much on a story as on the opportunity to tell a story well, and that opportunity depends in the first instance on an intelligent and coherent literary structure. Bad narrative-construction destroys this film's prospects of being more than a moderate commercial success.

For the fair amount of entertainment which *Absolute Quiet* gave me, I thank George B. Seitz, director, and Lionel Atwill, Stuart Erwin, Raymond Walburn, Irene Hervey, Wallace Ford, Bernadene Hayes, Ann Loring, Louis Hayward, Robert Gleckler and J. Carrol Naish, players. Few directors could have done so well as Seitz has with such an inadequate script. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, I understand, considers this veteran of Hollywood's directorial ranks greatly important to the company, because upon him it can rely to shoot a feature production in a short time with good results. To his credit are many fine pictures, no bad ones. Through no fault of his, they have been films lacking importance. For the fact that *Absolute Quiet* is above the bad classification, Metro primarily owes Seitz a pat on the back.

Splendid camera-employment in unfolding the story, fine sense of comedy and drama and of screen tempo are the dominant notes in the direction. Worthy of mention is the handling of close-ups, which display uncommon intelligence on the director's part. Since Seitz joined Metro's group of contract directors, he has not been permitted to film other than unimportant, inexpensive productions, often referred to as "quickies." And that is unfortunate. Given opportunity, he would be recognized

as a director of the John Ford caliber. That I am strongly convinced of.

Aside from direction, *Absolute Quiet*, to be an acceptable offering, demanded good acting, which it has. Lionel Atwill's performance, leaving nothing to be desired, is the finest I have seen him give. Stuart Erwin, seen far too rarely in pictures, is delightfully amusing. Bernadene Hayes, whose stage work I have viewed in various little theatres here but whom I never before this had seen on the screen, has what I am told is her first important film role, and she does splendidly in it. My conviction that Wallace Ford is one of the best actors we have is strengthened by his portrayal in this picture. The death scene of Miss Hayes and Ford is played beautifully. Raymond Walburn lends the film a good amount of humor. Never has Louis Hayward made the impression upon me that he was conscious of acting. Irene Hervey and Ann Loring, in addition to their intelligent performances, contribute beauty. Robert Gleckler, in a good, fat part, is excellent, and J. Carrol Naish makes his brief appearance stand out.

Had George F. Worts' story idea, which has good points, been constructed well, this review would have been a good deal more complimentary. The film has some nice photography by Lester White.

### *From the Editor's Easy Chair*

(Continued from page 15)

telligently. Even the advent of the sound device should not have been permitted to affect the medium which had proved its commercial worth. It was not up to the actors to change their ways. It was up to the producer to stick to the medium which had proved successful, and adapt the new element to it. Instead of waiting for the oldtimers to catch up with them, it would be wise for the producers to go back to the oldtimers.

\* \* \*

ALL FORMS OF entertainment depend upon new ideas for their continued popularity. The film industry constantly is looking for something new. It is willing to pay handsomely for ideas of box-office value. I have a good idea for Metro and have been trying to find time to go out to Culver City and sell it to Louis B. Mayer for enough to provide me with the San Fernando place I covet. The idea is this: Put Jackie Cooper in a picture in which he does not cry once. An innovation of that sort would be a box-office knockout. I do not wish to claim entire credit for the brilliant suggestion. My seven-year-old grandson gave me the germ of the idea. When I asked him if he wanted me to take him to see Jackie's latest picture, his reply was: "No. That kid makes me sick—the big cry-baby!"

\* \* \*

THE WARNER lot in Burbank is being dolled up with palms, shrubs and flowers. There is something more to this than just achieving beauty to please the eye. A studio's business is one of photographing emotions. Beauty is a stimulant to the emotions. An actor can give the camera only what he feels. Passing along a beautiful studio street, he accumulates something which he takes with him to the set, something which equips him to respond more readily to the emotional requirements of the scene he is playing. All the beauty of landscaping and

architecture a lot can achieve ultimately finds its way to the screen. A motion picture studio should be as beautiful as man and nature can make it. It is good business.

\* \* \*

EXHIBITORS should give thought to the reshowing of outstanding pictures. Elizabeth Perkins, who for some years conducted the Little Picture House on 59th Street, New York, brought back *Outward Bound* no less than twenty-two times for Monday showings. *Berkeley Square* played almost as many return engagements. Every Monday for years some old favorite was shown and business always was good. It suggests that instead of two new pictures constituting double programs, a new one and a successful old one might produce satisfactory results. If successful it would help to solve the booking problem.

\* \* \*

MANY TIMES I have expressed the conviction that the film industry has no ills that screen art cannot cure. If motion pictures were permitted to speak their own language, if they were made in accordance with the fundamentals of screen art, much of the story material which now rouses the ire of censors would be passed as acceptable. Offense lies more in the method of expression than in the material itself. The camera is more subtle than dialogue. It leaves more to the imagination. Greater use of the camera in telling stories will mean less interference by censors.

\* \* \*

"THE PAPERS report that Sam Briskin 'tore up' John Carroll's contract," writes a correspondent. "I have read many times that existing contracts have been torn up and new ones signed. I am curious. Do they ever really tear up contracts?" I asked Sam Briskin. They do not. When existing ones are terminated they are retained in the files; when new ones are signed the old ones stay in the files. Hitler is the only one who tears up contracts and he never could get a job in a Hollywood studio.

\* \* \*

WEEKLY *Variety*, in drawing attention to the fact that there are fewer musical shows on Broadway this season than in any other season since the war, gives as one of the reasons the presence in Hollywood of most of the popular composers and lyricists. The scarcity of musicals in New York is not due to the absence of the composers and lyricists. Their presence in Hollywood is due to the fact that the screen is a better medium than the stage for the presentation of musicals.

\* \* \*

ON THE STREET where I walk in the early mornings I pass a lot upon which a man cut down a great sycamore tree to make room for a house. In the general scheme of things the tree was of vastly more importance than the man and his family. Majestic trees should not be held as private property. They belong to all of us. Murdering them should be classed as a capital crime of which the law should take cognizance.

\* \* \*

THE PERSISTENCE of autograph hunters has become a major nuisance to screen personalities. We have laws for the abatement of other nuisances, even harmless little ones like throwing handbills on lawns or scattering litter in the streets. Even peddlers of lead pencils are regulated by ordinance. There should be a law compelling autograph hunters to efface themselves.

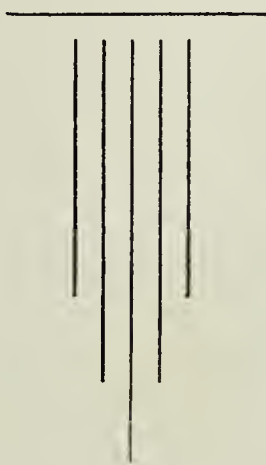
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*and*

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S P E C T A T O R

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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APRIL 25, 1936

No. 2

*After the Great Ziegfeld, What?  
Brains Needed, Not New Faces  
Comedy Relief a Story Evil  
Screen Should Preach Peace  
New York Lament in Rhyme*

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From the

# Editor's Easy Chair



**R**OGET'S THESAURUS and the dictionary are undone, routed—their superlatives drained of their meaning, vocabularies which depended upon them left gasping for new adjectives ending in est. And a motion picture is responsible for the verbal havoc.

The screen set out to glorify the man who glorified the American girl, and ended in glorifying itself, in giving the motion picture camera new dignity, in ushering in a new era of motion picture art. The Great Ziegfeld is more than the history of a man; it is a blazing chapter in the history of the screen, a chapter which points onward—to what? It seems incredible that motion pictures can progress beyond the point the Metro production has attained. But the man who threw away his candle and lighted the first kerosene lamp, thought the ultimate had been reached in the development of illumination. Progress has but one direction and always presents its back to what it has done. After The Great Ziegfeld we can expect anything, but we will have to recover from the shock of loveliness it has given us before our imaginations will function to see anything beyond it.

The sequence enacted on a revolving stage has no one in it for whom our sympathy has been enlisted. It is entirely impersonal, composed of people who are merely unknown faces, yet its sheer beauty, its purely esthetic appeal, earns an emotional response that brings physical discomfort to our throats and the mist of tears to our eyes. I have gazed upon the majestic grandeur of the Rockies and the Alps, the poetry of the moon above the Bay of Naples, the sleepy loveliness of rural England, the greatest paintings of the greatest artists, imposing creations of the art of architecture, many beautiful things in many places, but never before did Beauty, without significance beyond its beauty, stir my emotions as they were stirred when my eyes beheld what The Great Ziegfeld offers.

In its length, as well as in its composition, the picture is of epochal importance. It is marathon of motion, carrying us with it on a long course made short by the diversions it has to offer. It was a notable writing feat to stretch a story through its entire length and keep it in our minds when so much was provided for our eyes. It is a pictorial masterpiece and also a deeply human document, a striking example of the screen's versatility, of its capacity for merging all the arts in one of its own creations, for giving delicate beauty the impressiveness of thunder.

The world is under obligation to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer for the compliment paid it in assuming such an exquisite work of art would be appreciated. The film industry is under obligation to the producers for pointing the way to greater screen glories.

(Allan Hersholt's review of *The Great Ziegfeld* will be found on page 13.)

## What Hollywood Needs

**W**RITES Ed Schallert in *Los Angeles Times*: "Producers are continually harrassed by a shortage of talent that is far-reaching." "The sad lack of genuine stars is something that worries all of us engaged in making motion pictures," say Darryl Zanuck. "The movie public is fickle and constantly demands new faces," says Charlie Rogers who recently became king of Universal City. It is the film industry's misguided method of procedure that is responsible for all the ills it suffers. It was the sale of motion pictures which laid the foundation for the present great industrial structure. Before it grew out of its swaddling clothes it began to sell people instead of pictures, and it has been selling people ever since. If it does not break the habit, the habit eventually will break it.

I do not agree with the view expressed by Producer Rogers. The movie audience is not fickle. It is the most constant, loyal audience ever assembled. When it was supplied with motion pictures it patronized them as a matter of habit, and an exhibitor could estimate rather accurately at the beginning of a year what his books would show when the year ended. Since Hollywood ceased making motion pictures, the audience is having a difficult time finding substitutes which please it. It does

not tire of new faces. It tires of the new kind of entertainment in which the new faces have been presented since the screen replaced the camera with dialogue as its story-telling medium.

It is height of absurdity for producers to shift the responsibility for box-office fluctuations from their own shoulders to those of their stars. The same stars could go on for as long as the pictures in which they appear had the entertainment value the film audience demands. Instead of searching for new stars, producers should restore the old cinematic values which first assembled the audience. Stars never will be a satisfactory substitute for motion pictures. If producers thought in terms of their product, the star situation would take care of itself.

The greatest folly the industry is committing is its persistency in searching for new faces instead of making the kind of pictures that will create them. There will be a shortage as long as it exploits its stars instead of its product. Stars were created by the public's habit of patronizing film theatres. They were a by-product of pure cinema. When the microphone put an end to pure cinema, the stars were all that Hollywood had left to sell, and the public is refusing to keep steady the market for them because of the nature of the packages in which they are offered.

One of the most ridiculous arguments producers advance in defense of their action in substituting the microphone for the camera, is that the public was tiring of silent pictures because they were silent. Box-office conditions were unsatisfactory immediately prior to the advent of the sound device solely because of the lack of attention accorded silent pictures by those who made them. The stock exchange was all that mattered in Hollywood studios; Wall Street quotations were of greater importance than cinematic inspirations. Hollywood's indifference to its product bred indifference in its audience. The prosperity which talkies restored could have been restored and made permanent if Hollywood had switched its attention from Wall Street to Hollywood and continued in the business of making motion pictures.

Never having understood the nature of its product, its fundamentals, its psychological significance, the reasons for its spectacular popularity, Hollywood did not know what to do with sound when it got it. It chucked overboard everything that had made it great and blindly embarked on an entirely new business. A sparing use of the new element would have lent strength to the old product, but producers lacked, and still lack, the brains to understand it.

Hollywood does not need new stars. It needs new brains.

### *"But It Made 'em Laugh!"*

OF ALL the ridiculous things they do, the brainless exhibitions they give and the costly blunders they commit, "comedy relief" stands out as the most shining example of producers' ignorance of their medium. They cannot grasp the fact that the preservation of its unity is the first law governing the making of any art creation, that they should be governed in the making solely by the demands of the creation itself.

Of course, the first stumbling block encountered in a

discussion with those dumb enough to resort to comedy relief to make audiences laugh in places where they should not laugh, is the funny notion they have that a motion picture is not an art object, that they are businessmen engaged in making articles of commerce, and are not in the art business. If they were really good businessmen familiar with the business they are in, they would know a motion picture does not become an article of commerce until it is in the can, that up to that time it has nothing to do with business, being solely a creation of screen art no matter how it outrages all the laws of such art.

I stood on the sidewalk after a preview the other night and listened to a well known producer expounding his theories. I had asked him why, in the picture we had seen, he had introduced irrelevant comedy every time it grew interesting, and he undertook to set me right. The audience, he informed me, must have laughs, and as a businessman, it was up to him to provide them. Did I notice that every time the drunken man wandered into a scene the audience laughed? That was the answer! It made 'em laugh!

I told him if he had come to the preview in pink pajamas and a green hat, the audience would have got an additional laugh, but he did not understand me.

If this picture had obeyed the law of all arts demanding preservation of unity, the drunken man would have been as foreign to it as pink pajamas and a green hat would have been to the preview audience. It had a dramatic story, and every time the drama even approached tenseness, the drunken man was introduced to make the audience laugh itself out of its dramatic mood and then wait until the picture went through the process of recreating the mood essential to the enjoyment of the film.

And to clinch the argument that he was right, the producer chortles, "But it made 'em laugh!" It ruined the picture's chance of being a box-office success, of being accepted seriously by even a dumb audience, but it made 'em laugh. The producer seems to think that is the most important thing.

---

DURING THE DAY the Birthday Number of the SPECTATOR was made up, and on the following day when it was printed and put into the mails, eleven people, by letter and phone, informed us they wished to insert birthday greetings. The depth of our anguish can be gauged by computing our loss of revenue—eleven times thirty-five dollars. For a couple of months we whooped it up, urging our friends not to wait too long, and eleven we know of, and perhaps some others we do not know of, did wait too long. And we pulled a boner ourselves. Joel McCrea's birthday card did not get in. We have not yet found out why. When Joel called us up about the omission he said his wife—the charming and talented Frances Dee—told him to put her card in and that he forgot all about it, which was a most deplorable boner on Joel's part. We have put Frances and Joel and the other eleven on the list of those who will appear in the next quarter-page-only number which we will publish when we need more money. We do not care greatly if we have no advertising between these special numbers. We need revenue from advertising, but prefer to get it three or four times a year and have no bother about it when we are getting

out the rest of the SPECTATORS. I have an awful time with the Business Manager every time we discuss it. He favors a policy of going after all the money we can get, whether or not we need it. I tell him I don't see why we should, and he looks at me in a funny way which indicates he has doubts about my sanity, and there the matter rests.

\* \* \*

I HAD AN IDEA that it took decades to develop a chef, that real perfection in cooking could be acquired only by long years of practice. At the Beverly Brown Derby the other night I demanded of John, my favorite head waiter, that he take me to the kitchen and introduce me to the old man responsible for the *Tournedo of filet, Stroganoff* which had reduced me to a state of stuffed ecstasy. John was obliging. I met a lean young giant of the intellectual type. Robert Kreis is twenty-seven, learned his profession at a Swiss institution devoted solely to teaching it, and shares with every other artist the conviction that his individual medium of expression is the greatest of all. Kreis handles his viands with all the tender solicitude a painter accords his pigments or a sculptor his block of marble as it yields to his chiseling. And as I thought of the Swiss institution which teaches people the art of cooking, I pondered the lack of any institution outside Russia which teaches people the art of the screen. Of course, it might be argued that in the general scheme of things a *Tournedo of filet, Stroganoff* is of vaster importance than a motion picture, but motion pictures are of some importance to Hollywood, and it might not be a bad idea for their producers to get together and do something about teaching people how to make them. Even a small institution devoted to teaching producers what it is all about, would be a good beginning.

\* \* \*

I FOLLOW THE SAME course every morning on my pre-breakfast constitutional. I have so many interests I cannot neglect. Every twenty-four-hour advance spring has made is one of the details demanding constant attention, the progress of the blossoms on fruit trees, the roses which lean over the high wire fence as if trying to escape from the neglected garden in which the empty house stands, the new garden in which the bride putters and waves to me cheerily as I pass, the bungalow building on the lot where a great sycamore was murdered to give it room, the two tremendous rubber trees that a retired old duffer bought and took a house and lot along with them because it was the only way he could get the trees. Then there is the mother duck with the eleven snooty little ones which strut about with her and treat me with lofty indifference. Dogs, of course, all my friends now, though some of them took a lot of wooing; and the friendly woman whose big white cat lies on his back when I come along and purrs when I scratch his stomach. There are children, too. One of them this morning was surprised when he saw me. "Gee!" he exclaimed, "I have to beat it home. We're always at breakfast when you go by."

\* \* \*

THE SPECTATOR always has contended the screen is not an acting art, that a perfect performance can be given by anyone endowed with a capacity for absorbing a part until he instinctively responds to its emotional demands. When a player so endowed gives a poor performance, it is the result of his director's effort to make him act. *Film*

*Daily* quotes Phyllis Loughton, dramatic instructor, as follows: "Good actors don't act; they just put themselves in the position of the character that they portray, and remember their reactions at the times that they went through the emotions of the character involved." If we are to accept the second half of Miss Loughton's statement, a player actually would have to commit a murder before he could remember how to act the part of a murderer in a picture. A player always must be controlled by his emotions, not by his memory. But I agree with Miss Loughton when she says of Henry Fonda and Fred MacMurray: "In a strictly technical sense, I do not believe that either of these boys knows what it means to act. Certainly no one taught them to act. They are natural. It is in their very naturalness that their genius lies."

\* \* \*

IN ITS DESPERATE SEARCH for story material Will Hays will allow it to make into pictures, the film industry might turn its attention to peace. If Will is not afraid of munition makers, as he is of almost everything except Mary's little lamb, and only after the lamb has had a bath, the way would be open for the screen to preach the greatest peace sermon ever delivered. Man is the most inefficient creation of nature. Bugs, bees, birds, sun, moon, stars; flowers, shrubs, trees; valleys, hills, meadows—everything else on earth, animate and inanimate, performs its functions as nature ordains. Only man in mass is vile, unreliable, too ignorant and vicious to live at peace with his neighbor. But gradually he is turning from his major sin—war. He is ready to be preached to, to be told how the leaders of his state lead him to destruction in insane conflicts with other states, to be shown there is room on earth for all nations and no excuse for war. A tremendously powerful picture could be developed from such a theme. And the world needs it.

\* \* \*

I WILL HAVE TO revise the standard by which I criticize musical pictures. After the preview of *Colleen* I dolefully informed Hal Wallis it would be a flop, but he merely smiled and assured me it would achieve its end by proving to be a box-office success. I was equally confident it would not, and awaited its release to prove me right. *Colleen* is cleaning up, everywhere doing better than house averages. I cheerfully concede now that Hal Wallis and Robert Lord, who produced it, know a darned sight better than I do what constitutes the entertainment quality of a musical picture. In each one I view I look for story value, but obviously the public does not. It is a tough job to tell a connected story when there are constant interruptions in the way of song and dance numbers. Musicals, therefore, are a species of their own to which ordinary cinematic values do not apply. Critics all over the country condemned *Colleen* as I did, but the box-office differed with us, and it always has the last word, always is right.

\* \* \*

WHEN AN AUTHOR turns out a dramatic novel which becomes a popular success, Hollywood buys it and thinks it has scored a triumph if it can persuade the author to accept a large sum for adapting it for the screen. If the producer wanted paintings made of the big scenes in the novel, he would not expect the author to paint them. He would hire a painter. But asking the author to paint the pictures would be basically no more ridiculous than asking

him to rewrite them for the screen. Both painting and the screen are mediums in which the author is not trained. Producers exploit the fact that novelists have been engaged to adapt their stories for the screen. They are unaware that such exploitation is public confession of their own ignorance of motion picture essentials. Adaptations are fool things, anyway. A trained scenarist can put a novel or play into shooting-script form effectively without being hampered by an adaptation made by someone who has no knowledge of screen technique.

\* \* \*

SOME SCREEN PEOPLE are living a motion picture story which could be made into a production with epic sweep. Paul Muni, Al Jolson, Edward Everett Horton, Hal Wallis, Adolphe Menjou, are only a few of those who have bought acres in San Fernando Valley and built their homes on them. There they will grow things, live close to nature, breathe the air of the out-doors. And millions of other people all over the country are obeying the same impulse. The depression is responsible for an extraordinary spiritual awakening. People are thinking less in material terms and more in the true values of life. I passed a man this morning who was washing his car in the street in front of his house, a little house set in a flower garden on a secluded thoroughfare. "Just think," he said to me, "I used to pay a couple of chauffeurs for having this fun, and a couple of gardeners for that," and he waved at the beds of bloom. He has retained just enough of his once great fortune to keep up the little place, and in the whole world I do not think you could find a happier couple than the sunbonnetted woman who was on her knees among her crocuses, and the man who was washing his car in the street. They are living what could be a theme for a great motion picture.

\* \* \*

KATHERINE BEST, capable motion picture editor of *Stage*, New York, contributes to a recent number of that publication an entertaining article on the rising popularity of screen villains. She mentions some of the "purveyors of celluloid milk and honey," and goes on: "But editorial and verbal honors have been for the Edward G. Robinsons and the Victor McLaglens and the Margot Grahames and the Charles Laughtons." If the honors Miss Best mentions can last through a few more villainous characterizations by these artists, then the villain will have come into his own. It is he who puts all the blood in the veins of a screen story, who provides the conflict which gives the story the bulk it must assume to stretch to feature length. His is the character which should be drawn most carefully in the script. Our heroes and heroines receive too much attention. The public has demonstrated it likes villainous villains. Give them to it.

\* \* \*

WHILE VIEWING *The Story of Louis Pasteur* a second time, the thought came to me that the screen is the most concise form of expression we have. When the picture ends we have the impression that we are acquainted with the entire adult life of Pasteur both as a scientist and a man of family, that we know him intimately, all his moods, idiosyncrasies, characteristic gestures. It would take months to put into a book and hours of careful reading to form even one half as intimate acquaintance with the man as we can get from the screen in a little more than an hour and without mental exertion on our part.

Without question the screen is a better medium for the presentation of a play than the stage. So is it proving a better medium than books for the presentation of biographies.

\* \* \*

THE MOTION PICTURE industry is facing great odds in its fight to retain its block-booking practice. Particularly in presidential election years, the actions of congress are influenced mainly by consideration of the effect legislation will have on the November voting. The merits of proposed bills have little to do with their ultimate disposition. All the forces lined up against block-booking mean hundreds of thousands of votes if the members of the organizations represented at the recent hearing in Washington share the views of their spokesmen. There are only a few producers. All the political strength, therefore, is on the side of those opposing block-booking, and political strength is the strongest argument that can be presented in Washington.

\* \* \*

AS LONG AS PRODUCERS comb the literary market for authors there will be a dearth of motion picture stories. When producers look only for stories possessing cinematic values, no matter who writes them, the shortage no longer will exist. There never has been a lack of suitable stories. The trouble has been the lack of studio ability to appraise the values of the stories submitted for consideration. A poor story by a well known author is purchased and a better one by an unknown is returned. The majority of writers on studio payrolls have been trained to express themselves in another medium and have no knowledge of the requirements of screen material, a failing they share with those who employ them.

\* \* \*

ALEXANDER KORDA knows something besides how to make good motion pictures. He wants to sell his output to American exhibitors and he understands how to go about it. He realizes that star names are not the only ones having box-office value over here, and as stars come high, he goes after some who do not cost as much. In *The Ghost Goes West* he cast Eugene Pallette and Jean Parker. American audiences know these names. On American marquees they will look familiar, will make the foreign picture look less foreign. By following this practice Korda can establish his own stars with American audiences until they are strong enough to go it alone. It is wise salesmanship.

\* \* \*

AMERICANS as a rule regard the English habit of drinking afternoon tea as one too effeminate for men to indulge in. The Englishman, however, rarely does anything without good reason. A dish of tea late in the afternoon, and the relaxation during the interval devoted to its drinking, give the drinker fresh vigor for winding up the rest of the working hours. In this country we begin to get tired about the time the Englishman drinks his tea, and we continue to get more tired until we knock off for the day. Serving tea on motion picture sets each afternoon would make the last shots of the day as full of pep as the first ones in the morning. One director is doing it and it works.

\* \* \*

I WAS STANDING beside a fence through which a gorgeous rose reached out to me. On my morning walks I always carry a pair of scissors in case I want to cut my

way through any flowers that may bar my progress when I happen to stray from the path I am on or by mistake find myself in a garden guarded only by a shuttered house. I stealthily drew my scissors and was about to snip off the rose when I heard approaching footsteps. A man appeared and caught me at it. "Go ahead, steal it," he said as he approached. And as he was passing me, he added, "I'd steal it myself if I didn't happen to own the garden." That took all the zest out of it. I snipped off a rose farther along the path and went on home.

\* \* \*

A SPECTATOR SUBSCRIBER in Rome, Italy, sends me a letter in which she asks for certain information about scenario writing. There is nothing unusual about that; almost every mail brings me something of the sort. But this sentence in the letter from Rome is unusual: "I am enclosing my picture to give you an idea with whom you are corresponding." Reading the letter and studying the photograph combine to create in me a feeling of acquaintanceship with my correspondent. In this case it helps, for she is a fine looking young woman of the intellectual type. With my answer, however, will go no photograph of me. She might be disappointed. But her idea is a good one.

\* \* \*

THEY DO IT in staid old England, too. "Tatler," writing in *Daily Film Renter*, London, wants it stopped. He might be describing almost any Hollywood important preview night when he says: "By the way, when is something going to be done to put an end to this silly mobbing of stars on the slightest possible provocation? I am told that at the premiere of *Magnificent Obsession* at the Regal, Tom Walls was actually knocked off his feet, and other well-known artistes, as they stepped out from their cars, literally had to fight their way through a seething mob of so-called fans who, if they had their way, would have torn the clothes from their backs as souvenirs!"

\* \* \*

IF A SUCCESSION of musical high spots in last year's pictures will keep a large audience entertained for an hour and a half, why not the release each January of films from each studio showing the previous year's greatest dramatic punches, the best love scenes, the comedy high spots? The industry is hard put to turn out B pictures to share dual bills with the big fellows, and the films I suggest would serve to relieve that pressure and provide entertainment I am sure audiences would welcome. And the only expense would be the buying of more film and the sticking of pieces of it together, as well as the upkeep of those who do the sticking.

\* \* \*

EYEBROWS are getting me. In *Timothy's Quest*, a new Paramount picture, Eleanore Whitney plays a country girl of a generation ago, a simple, shy little orphan who has seen nothing of the world. Her eyebrows, however, are of this year's model, pencilled lines which reach a latitude never achieved by human brows. They nullify all her efforts to impress us as a simple country maiden. They tell us she is just an actress playing a girl of yesterday and forgetful enough to be wearing eyebrows of today. It is a big handicap to place on a performance.

\* \* \*

RECENTLY A PEACOCK came close to where I was standing and spread his tail. He held the pose for a long

time, during which I marvelled at what I saw—the amazing coloring woven into orderly patterns—the exquisite workmanship of the individual feathers—the quills as strings in a mighty harp quivering with a rhapsody in hues. Man can dig a Panama Canal, build a Boulder Dam, design a cathedral, but he cannot do anything so wonderful as making a peacock.

\* \* \*

WE HEAR A GREAT DEAL of talk about the wisdom or unwisdom of mass production. "As long as we have mass production we will not have an even run of good pictures," an eastern writer comments. There is no such thing as mass production. Each picture is a separate undertaking in no way related to any other. True, some producers meddle with a lot of productions, but that is not mass production. It is muddled production.

\* \* \*

SO MANY KIND THINGS have been said of the appearance of the last Spectator that we would like to pass the credit on to those who earned it. The typographical arrangement reveals the skill of Rex Robertson, whose printing establishment is at 407 East Pico Street; and the excellent presswork, which always characterizes the SPECTATOR, is done by the Independent Press Room, 540 South San Pedro Street.

\* \* \*

WHEN IT OPENED, the Egyptian Theatre was owned jointly by Sid Grauman and Joe Schenck. Five years later Sid told Joe he would sell his half interest for three-quarters of a million dollars. "Drop in tomorrow," said Joe. Sid did. "Sign here," said Joe. Sid did. And Joe handed him a check for seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Those were the days!

\* \* \*

I READ WITH INTEREST in the Omaha *World-Herald* an appreciative review of *Eagle's Brood*, one of Harry Sherman's series of excellent Western pictures. A short paragraph at the end of the extended review mentioned what it evidently considered the relatively unimportant fact that Jim Cagney, in *Frisco Kid*, was on the same bill. Jack Warner will not like that.

\* \* \*

DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS, JR. is a young man I admire exceedingly. He has sufficient talent to carry him through a prosperous career as an actor with nothing to worry about except how to spend his money. But he is not content with that prospect. He prefers a busy, responsible career as a producer of pictures. He is one young fellow who will get along.

\* \* \*

IF THE FILM INDUSTRY had nerve enough to make political pictures, that stalwart Republican, Louis B. Mayer, might be inspired to go after Franklin D. by basing one on the huge bonuses paid by the government to sugar producers to recompense them for not making too much sugar. It might be called *Scrutiny of the Bounty*.

\* \* \*

THE WAY TO FIGURE the financial returns of a picture is on the basis of per dollar of production cost. For every dollar of its cost *The Miracle Man*, the silent classic, returned, roughly, twenty dollars. *The Great Ziegfeld* is costing around two million dollars. Before it can boast of being as profitable as *The Miracle Man* it will have to gross forty millions.

IT WOULD BE INTERESTING to know how much the progress of motion pictures will be due to the activity of present day young fellows who put their nickels and dimes together, rig up a camera of sorts, and use their heads as they go adventuring into the art of the screen. Gunther von Fritsch, doing something or other out at Culver City, used to back me into an MGM corner and tell me some of the things he would attempt if only he could get a chance. I know many like him, young fellows teeming with original ideas, burning with ambition to do something with them. They seldom get anywhere. Studios are content to plug along with the old ideas and give ambitions little encouragement. Apparently Von Fritsch struck out for himself. The other day he showed me a 16 MM short subject he made in conjunction with Arthur Ornitz, another young fellow who wants to know what it is all about. *On the Loose* has as its hero an intelligent mongrel dog whose efforts to find a master form the story. A camera was rigged inside a suit-case and candid camera shots, which compose the picture, were made on crowded streets, in restaurants and other places where people meet. Now the young fellows want to put a standard camera in just a little bigger suit-case and shoot a feature picture. They should be given an opportunity to realize their ambition. It is in brains such as theirs that the screen's hope of advancement lies.

\* \* \*

OUR LONE READER in Sandusky, Ohio, in renewing his subscription, gently takes me to task for repeating myself. In the last ten years I have written over three million words which have appeared in these columns. I am aware I repeat myself, but it would take a better man than I am to write over three million words on one subject without saying one thing more than once.

\* \* \*

THE SURNAME of Mordaunt Shairp, screen writer, is pronounced Sharp. A poor speller in the family a few centuries ago put the "i" in because he did not know any better, and the family, being Scotch and getting the extra letter for nothing, has hung on to it ever since without expending any breath on an effort to pronounce it.

\* \* \*

GOOD PERFORMANCES, as such, have little box-office value. Audiences do not assemble in film theatres to see acting. Their desire is to see certain people go through seven reels. If a newsreel cameraman would follow Greta Garbo around until he shot seven reels of her daily doings, people would flock to see them on the screen.

\* \* \*

W. G. VAN SCHMUS, managing director of Radio City Music Hall and general guardian of the Rockefeller's vast amusement investments, writes: "I hope I am not too late to send you congratulations on the SPECTATOR's tenth anniversary. May I extend good wishes and the hope that it may live to a ripe old age?"

\* \* \*

THE OTHER DAY I dropped into the RKO publicity department just in time to hear Perry Lieber end a telephone conversation with "It will finish at Santa Anita at three o'clock this afternoon." I think he was referring to the only horse I bet on during the winter race meeting.

\* \* \*

SAW MAN MOUNTAIN DEAN standing on a Sunset Boulevard corner, an all-day sucker in his hand. The big sissy!

# New York Spectacle

By Betsy Beaton

New York, April 20.

THE 1936 ice carnival which I viewed recently is by far the most fantastic thing I ever have seen. From Sonja Henie's interpretation of the *Dying Swan* to the two Caley sisters doing the most astounding leaps and seeming to stand still in mid-air, the picture was complete. The way Jack Dunn, the British champion, Sonja Henie and others kept time to music continually amazed me. I was entranced through every minute of the long program. Somehow I felt the whole of Madison Square Garden should have been transplanted to the Russia of prerevolutionary times with Nijinsky, Pavlowa, Karsavina and Khessinskaya featured in a command performance on ice of the same artistic proportions as those at the old Marinsky Theater.

I have never considered ice skating very seriously, and never in my wildest imaginings had I thought of it as the graceful art it is today. It opens a new field. Lights were played on the ice during Sonja Henie's dance of the *Dying Swan* to make it look like water. The whole effect was most realistic. She did most of the dance pirouetting on her toes, only to swing suddenly into low, powerful glide. Somehow one could almost picture the great Vaslof Nijinsky interpreting *L'Apré Midi D'un Faun*, perhaps, in this novel medium of expression, for his famous *entre chat* and flying leap at the finish of *Spectre de La Rose* resemble in a way the varied and intricate maneuverings of this most difficult art. It would appear that in order to be among the top-flight figure skaters of today, one must be well trained in the technique of the ballet. In fact, another similarity between the ballet and figure skating is that in order to be most proficient, one must begin learning at the age of four or five years, as did Sonja Henie.

The two Caley sisters, of the Granite Club of Toronto, who could hardly be more than fifteen or sixteen years old, stole the show. Their figures and perfectly synchronized movements caused the onlookers to give them, with the possible exception of the thrice Olympic champion, Sonja Henie, the biggest ovation of the evening.

Society in full regalia lined the front tier of boxes, giving a gala touch to the proceedings. The whole affair was handled with a certain majesty. Several times during the evening I had the impression that I was witnessing an event that was epoch-making both in the world of sport and that of art.

\* \* \*

I passed through a town called Hershey in Pennsylvania the other day, where all the Hershey Bars, famous for some fifty odd years, are made. It is one of the most fantastic places I have ever seen. If one could Americanize a fairy town, Hershey might be it. It stands out particularly in my mind because the sudden shock of coming across bits of Versailles, Beverly Hills, London and the old Japanese Gardens in San Francisco, after the humdrumness of the factory towns so common to these parts,



was almost too much for me. The Hershey family has equipped the town with everything from an amusement park to a model dairy. Everything is beautifully green. Three golf clubs, a large country club, an Industrial School, several theatres, a hotel that stands high upon a hill, and every comfort one could possibly wish for are there. The workers have tastefully decorated homes. The builders of this representative town had no wish to further its population. It is simply a factory town, but a factory town of the most amazing resources, comforts and luxury, built on the nickles of the sweet-toothed citizenry. The industrial school, incidentally, is free to the most promising boys in that section.

\* \* \*

Is anything more ghastly than row after row of sameness of houses? In traveling through these small towns one is impressed with the resigned attitude of the tenants of the houses. If I had to live a portion of my life in one of them, I am afraid I would be tempted to do something strange and awesome to the facade—paint it blue and green and pink with orange stripes. Anything to be different.

\* \* \*

A great blot on the escutcheon of Pennsylvania took place recently. During the flood, a city was put under martial law by orders from Harrisburg, the state capital, and no beer or liquor was allowed to be sold during the period of the emergency. The theory was that less looting would take place. It is paradoxical that the National Guard, who were ordered out to prevent anything of the sort and see that all rules of marital law were observed, broke all the rules themselves.

A captain and his men were guarding a street on which there was a State liquor store. One or two men led by the captain invaded the store, and the other men soon followed their example. The result was that the captain and his men became so drunk that some of them had to be carried to the main hotel. The captain lay unconscious for several days. He is going to be court-martialed. All of which leads us to wonder of what use the National Guard would be in a real emergency, a revolution, say, when they would be called upon to protect lives and property. This episode has created as much of a scandal in these parts as did the spectacle of the King of Rumania attending King George's funeral in England.

A decidedly ironic note has been struck by store owners in the flood area, who advertise "Flood Sales" of all their damaged goods. Their store windows look so foreign in their undecorated state.

It gives one a strange feeling, eating in a restaurant which a short two or three weeks ago was filled with from four to six feet of water. A damp musty smell pervades everything, and scarred walls and floors are a mute memento. Only two people, incidentally, in the whole of Williamsport, which was almost completely inundated, carried flood insurance.

\* \* \*

The Stork Club is the gayest place in town. It affords to give mammoth gardenias to all the ladies present each evening. . . . All the street car lines are being liquidated here. Pedestrians and motorists alike are thanking their lucky stars. Sixth Avenue, with its elevated and street car lines, was especially nerve-wracking. The Sixth Avenue elevated will also join the ranks of the discarded.

Buses are being substituted. . . . Someone should discover Teddy Lynch, well-known New York debutante singer, for pictures. . . . I am so very bored with the little boy who runs about next door beating a large tin pan with a large hammer. . . . Adolph Menjou is excellent in the new Harold Lloyd film. His change from suave sartorial leading man is for the better. Verree Teasdale, incidentally, has more choice lines allotted to her in this picture than has any actress playing in a Broadway comedy today.

I wonder who is responsible for the current opus, *Snowed Under*, with George Brent, Genevieve Tobin and Glenda Farrell. I missed the first three minutes of this, unfortunately, for had I seen them I might have missed the remaining hour and a half of agony. There might have been a time when the sight of a healthy man and three women fainting in a row would have amused an audience. But this audience was very tired and a little weary, and when the fainting en masse took place she put on her hat and began to leave. A missing belt brought her back, however, and forced her to occupy the seat until the picture was finished and the lights went on. It was all very sad, especially as La Tobin is one of my favorites.

Unusually funny were the reviews of Grace Moore's appearance in *Boheme* at the Metropolitan. One critic began by what appeared to be praise, stating that her voice had improved since he had heard it last at the Met. Midway he confessed that this meant little, since it was really not so good either time, and before he had finished with his sarcastic demolition, which included a description of the diva throwing flowers to onlookers as she came out of the stage door, the fate of the afternoon performance was quite clear.

## Reviews

### Mr. Well's New World

THINGS TO COME, London Film-United Artists release. Producer, Alexander Korda; direction, William Cameron Menzies; original screen play, H. G. Wells; special effects, Ned Mann; art director, Vincent Korda; photography, George Perinal; trick photography, Harry Zech. Cast: Raymond Massey, Ralph Richardson, Maurise Braddell, Edward Chapman, Sophie Stewart, Derrick De Marney, Margaretta Scott, Alan Jeayes, Pickles Livingstone, Anthony Holles, Pearl Argyle, Patricia Hilliard, Sir Cedric Hardwicke.

EVERY once in a while there comes along a motion picture one really must see. It may be because it has attracted attention abroad, because it has a new personality you have read about but have not seen, because of new technique used. Or it may be simply that it is rated as good entertainment. Anyway, *Things to Come* is one you have to see because of a number of reasons. It was made by a great producer. The story was written by a great thinker. It is an extraordinary technical accomplishment. It records the progress motion picture production is making in England. And it presents a social problem of tremendous significance.

Do not miss it. You will see sets that will astonish you and effects that will bewilder you if you are as fortunate as I am in my ignorance of how such things are done. You will see expert direction by William Cameron Menzies in every department of the great produc-

tion except the dialogue. Some of it is much too loud. You will grant there are geniuses in Alexander Korda's technical department as inspired as any Hollywood can boast. Physically, *Things to Come* is screen history.

But, most of all, the picture will make you think. It gives you H. G. Wells' conception of which way civilization is heading. Or I suppose it does. His title is affirmative, not speculative. It challenges your own mental picture of the world a century hence and will provoke you into comparing your conception with that of the distinguished author's. Wells first destroys existing civilization in the next few decades and then builds a new one of his own conception.

The mental satisfaction the picture gave me lay in my refusal to accept his views. He gives us a new world of angles and parallels, a mechanically contrived civilization of straight lines and physical discomfort, houses without windows, chairs without cushions, and people without sense enough to seek greater ease. If we accept Wells' conception of the things that are coming, those living now will meet death with a relieved smile.

Korda is entitled to the greatest credit for the magnificent manner in which he has presented the fruit of the author's thinking, but I do not imagine you will agree with the author's disregard of the present trend of civilization which reflects a growing appreciation of esthetic values and spiritual qualities. In one hundred years man could not change his ways and go as far in the other direction as Wells would have us believe. That, in any event, is my conviction, and I think it will be yours after you view the picture.

*Things to Come* will be shown at the Four Star Theatre, and all Hollywood should view it.

### *Thanks To Bill and Jean*

THE EX-MRS. BRADFORD, R.K.O. Associate producer, Edward Kaufman; director, Stephen Roberts; screen play by Anthony Veiller; story by James Edward Grant; photographed by J. Roy Hunt, A.S.C.; musical director, Roy Webb; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate, Perry Ferguson; edited by Arthur Roberts; assistant director, Clem Beauchamp. Cast: William Powell, Jean Arthur, James Gleason, Eric Blore, Robert Armstrong, Lila Lee, Grant Mitchell, Erin O'Brien-Moore, Ralph Morgan, Lucile Gleason, Frank M. Thomas, Frankie Darro, Frank Reicher, Charles Richman, John Sheehan, Paul Fix.

THE row behind me at the preview of this one had been reserved for the studio executives, and when the picture began the executives who took the seats immediately behind mine, started an important conference which lasted pretty much throughout the showing. I knew they were from a motion picture studio, for it is the only place in which you can find loud-mouthed, ignorant asses who talk in a picture house to impress the seat-holders within hearing distance. There are not many of them, but there should be none of them.

However, I doubt if I would have been able to follow the story of *The Ex-Mrs. Bradford* if I had been allowed to concentrate on it. It is a formula murder mystery, a triple mystery, for it has three splendid murders—I think there were three—and almost two or three more. I am a little hazy about details, but I recall that on at least two occasions only the script saved Bill Powell from being shot. In murder mystery pictures the bullet always misses

the hero, but goes straight through the heart of the poor devil whom the script designates as the ultimate corpse.

Owing to the vocal distractions behind me I was unable to get more than a muddled idea of what the whole thing was about, but I did not miss the excellent and amusing performances of Bill Powell and Jean Arthur. They make the picture worthwhile. Bill gives us in full measure what he has taught us to expect from him, and Jean continues to create the impression that each of her appearances is better than all her previous ones. She lifts this undistinguished and gruesome story into the realm of high comedy, garnering laughs aplenty as she romps through the part.

I can remember no horse race sequence in a picture more thrilling than this one contains. It, too, is something that almost in itself makes it worth seeing.

Stephen Roberts gives the production excellent direction. Particularly in handling the dialogue is he most effective, permitting none of the loud talking which make so many pictures hard to listen to. He gets satisfactory performances from all the members of the cast, although I have no idea what most of them had to do with the story.

### *Bobby Breen a Revelation*

LET'S SING AGAIN. Produced by Sol Lesser; directed by Kurt Neumann; original story, adaptation and screen play by Don Swift and Dan Jarrett; production manager, Edward Gross; photography, Harry Neumann, A.S.C.; art direction, Ben Carre; assistant director, Fred Tyler; film editor, Robert Crandall; sound, Richard E. Taylor; musical setting conceived and directed by Hugo Riesenfeld; associate, Abe Meyer. Songs: LET'S SING AGAIN, by Jimmy McHugh and Gus Kahn; LULLABY, by Hugo Riesenfeld and Selma Hautzik; FARMER IN THE DELL, by Samuel Pokrass and Charles O. Locke. Cast: Bobby Breen, Henry Armetta, George Houston, Vivienne Osborne, Grant Withers, Inez Courtney, Richard Carle, Lucien Littlefield, Ann Doran, Clay Clement.

THERE are several features of this picture which make it a noted addition to the cinema program. It is the most cleverly constructed musical picture ever to appear on the screen. It introduces to us a most amazing boy, a nine-year-old singer whose voice will thrill the world. It is a warmly human story, told so well that every interpolated song is part of it. It contains a characterization by Henry Armetta that should be given a place among those considered for this year's Academy award.

Add to all the above some glorious singing by George Houston, as well as a good performance by him; the gracious presence of the beautiful and talented Vivienne Osborne, seen far too seldom; an impressive heavy by Grant Withers, a complete production provided by Sol Lesser, outstanding direction by Kurt Neumann and good photography by Harry Neumann, and you have everything to please any audience anywhere. *Let's Sing Again* could play New York's famed Music Hall and give thorough satisfaction. It will not be given the place in the sun to which its many virtues entitle it, for it lacks the bulk exploiters of pictures confuse with cinematic values.

In the person of Bobby Breen the picture gives the world a new star. He is a revelation. An intelligent little actor with an emotional nature to earn him the instant sympathy of the most blasé audience, he possesses a

voice of power, range and musical quality that is astonishing. He is so full of music that one fairly can see it course its way down the rhythmic gestures of his arms and drip off his expressive finger-tips. With equal ease and charm he sings a grand opera aria and a lilting lullaby. He appeals as an artist, not as a child.

The story is an original, written directly for the screen by Don Swift and Dan Jarrett, and as a masterly piece of screen writing, it, also, is a candidate for Academy recognition if ever the Academy acquires the habit of recognizing true cinematic values to govern its awards. It is a story rich in human interest, told with disregard for nonessentials and an easy forward flow which does not permit the attention of the audience to lag for a moment. As it proceeds it picks up its various songs and fits them easily into their places. And it does something never before done in a picture of the sort—the singing of the last song is the dramatic and emotional high point of the production. The clever building to the situation, the cumulative effect of all that has gone before, makes the little figure of Bobby Breen and his glorious golden notes a combination of esthetic and sympathetic appeal which will bring lumps to throats and tears to eyes in any audience.

Of distinct musical appeal also is the fine baritone voice of George Houston. He sings with ease and grace matched by his acting. I cannot understand why we do not see him more often. Vivienne Osborne is another who should be given more opportunities. She has all the elements that make for popularity.

Henry Armetta contributes to this picture the greatest performance of his career. Ordinarily he is called upon to burlesque his roles. Here we have him in a straight sympathetic part which he handles with distinction and full appreciation of all its human values. His comedy is delightful, but none of the sympathetic quality of his characterization is sacrificed to it. If the picture had been turned out by one of the major studios and given the attention paid its product, it would make Henry Armetta a star.

Kurt Neumann apparently was inspired by the possibilities of the script. Particularly in the direction of the dialogue is his work outstanding, being free from stage declamation and the loud talking which harm so many pictures. We get the impression that Neumann was intent only on telling the story, upon allowing it to stress its own points, upon presenting his characters as people and not as actors endeavoring to exploit their individual dramatic talents. All the elements at his disposal are blended into a neat, smooth pattern by his intelligent direction.

Credit goes to Hugo Riesenfeld for his conception and direction of the picture's musical setting. Until the film barons awaken to the value of complete musical scores, we have reason to be thankful for the good measure of background music supplied many of the scenes in *Let's Sing Again*. The picture contains three songs, enumerated at the head of this review, which audiences will like.

UNA MERKEL writes me, "I haven't kissed the Blarney Stone at all when I say I thoroughly enjoy the SPECTATOR and read it from cover to cover. It is invigorating and interesting." Atta girl!

## Could Have Been Better

THE FIRST BABY, 20th Century-Fox. Directed by Lewis Seiler; associate producer, John Stone; original story and screen play by Lamar Trotti; photography, Barney McGill, A.S.C.; art direction, Duncan Cramer; assistant director, William Eckhardt; film editor, Al De Gaetano. Cast: Johnny Downs, Shirley Deane, Jane Darwell, Dixie Dunbar, Marjorie Gaton, Gene Lockhart, Taylor Holmes, Willard Robertson, Hattie McDaniel.

JOHNNY DOWNS, a nice boy; Jane Darwell and Gene Lockhart, his human and likable parents; Shirley Deane, most decidedly a nice girl; Marjorie Gaton, her catty mother, and Taylor Holmes, her hen-pecked father—the personnel of an exceedingly loud and talkative domestic drama which could have been much better than it is, but which has enough entertainment value to make it worth while. The story is an original written directly for the screen by Lamar Trotti, as all motion picture stories will be when the film industry emerges from its intellectual adolescence, and it needed just a little more intelligence in its writing, direction and supervision to make it completely satisfactory entertainment.

There is too much chattering in it, a fault emphasized by the manner in which the dialogue is directed. Throughout its entire length characters yell at one another without regard for the meaning of scenes, no attempt being made to lend intimacy to conversations which should be intimate. The very monotony of the loudness makes it nerve-wracking to listen to and brings out in bold relief the excessive amount of talking. In all other respects—the movements of the characters, their grouping, the picture's tempo—Lewis Seiler's direction is competent, but in his future pictures he would do well to display a more intelligent grasp of dialogue's function in a screen offering.

Marjorie Gaton motivates the story in a clever characterization of an objectionable hen with one chick. Her aim is to mold with velvet claws the fate of her only daughter, Shirley Deane, a failing as old as time and as modern as today, and she succeeds in making herself hateful and her daughter appealing. With a little more schooling, Shirley will make her mark in pictures. She has good looks and native ability as aids to gaining the sympathy of audiences. She has the best line in the picture: "Stop yelling at me!" she wails at Johnny Downs, expressing a sentiment which I felt like greeting with three rousing cheers.

When I first saw Johnny on the screen I predicted big things for him. *The First Baby* reveals rapid strides he is making in justifying my enthusiasm. In all respects except in the reading of lines, for which the direction is to blame, he gives a thoroughly capable performance, displaying emotional depths only hinted at in his previous appearances.

Jane Darwell, as Johnny's understanding mother, scores another of the hits we always can expect from her. It is all of a quarter of a century since she first earned my admiration by her performances in stock in Seattle, and it is gratifying to see her still going strong.

Apparently Twentieth Century is having a tough time trying to find work for Dixie Dunbar. She is the engaging miss whose personality and tap dancing added to the entertainment value of *King of Burlesque*. In *The First*

*Baby* she is unfortunate enough to have an absurd role as an office clerk who tap dances her way from desk to desk. "But it made 'em laugh!" the producers will protest. They would have laughed even more heartily if Jane Darwell had thrown a custard pie at Marjorie Gateson's face. And the pie in a drawing room would have been no more absurd than tap dancing in an office.

I have read quite a bit about the appearance of Gene and Kathleen Lockhart in a series of Mr. and Mrs. motion pictures. Gene's work in *The First Baby* suggests it would be wise to get the series under way. He is an excellent actor and teamed with his talented wife should prove a box-office winner.

Taylor Holmes and Willard Robertson appear to good advantage, and Hattie McDaniel, the somewhat massive colored comedienne, is her usual efficient self.

### *Is Given Poor Direction*

THREE ON THE TRAIL. (Adapted from Clarence E. Mulford's BAR 20 THREE.) Produced by Harry Sherman; directed by Howard Bretherton; associate producer, George Green; adaptation by Doris Schroeder; screen play by Doris Schroeder and Vernon Smith; assistant directors, Theodore Joos and Derwin Abrahams; film editor, Edward Schroeder; photography by Archie Stout, A.S.C.; sound, Earl Sitar; art director, Lewis Rachmil; special effects, Mel Wolf. Cast: William Boyd, Jimmy Ellison, Onslow Stevens, Muriel Evans, George Hayes, Claude King, William Duncan, Clara Kimball Young, Ernie Adams, Ted Adams, John St. Polis, Al Hill, John Ruth-erford, Lita Cortez.

THIS latest of Harry Sherman's Westerns for Paramount release is not as entertaining as those in the series which preceded it, but it still has considerable entertainment value. No western is a total loss. There are always the he-men and the wide open spaces, and it is a rare picture of the sort which does not contain some fine photography. *Three on the Trail* takes us to locales where nature tossed weird rocks in all directions and left them there in irregular, distorted groups, to slumber in desert sands for all the time there is left.

Producer Sherman has reached the point now when he must consider how long the same scenarist, the same director and the same cast can continue to turn out something different each time they unite in making a picture. Doris Schroeder, scenarist; Howard Bretherton, director; Bill Boyd, Jimmy Ellison and George Hayes, actors, put vigor and enthusiasm into the first pictures of the series, but the latest one gives the impression that they are running out of ideas. There was nothing new in the script given Bretherton, and what he had he directed badly.

As a demonstration of how dialogue should not be directed, the picture would serve a useful purpose if all other directors would view it. Law-abiding citizens stalking desperadoes in silent desert wastes, discuss their strategy in tones so loud their quarry could not escape hearing them. Asides are spoken loudly enough to carry to the most distant ears in mass shots. Dialogue lines get their true significance more from the manner in which they are read, the expression put into them, than from the words which compose them. It is the director's business, therefore, to give dialogue its real meaning, and in this instance Bretherton makes a sorry job of it.

I liked Bill Boyd in his other appearances but he, too, seems to have nothing new to offer. His grin is broad as

ever, but he cannot stretch it over so many pictures and keep its sincerity intact. A new director and a more vigorous script might wake him up. George Hayes is a clever comedian, but after about the tenth time, his "wimmen are poisonous," fails to entertain.

Jimmy Ellison is the only one of the standbys who retains his enthusiasm. He is a boy who will go a long way. He is being given excellent schooling in the Sherman series, but he, too, would profit by a change of directors. In Muriel Evans, Producer Sherman gives us the most promising girl he yet has presented. There are some rough edges on her performance, but she seems to have the stuff that makes for popularity. Onslow Stevens, with talent enough to be an impressive heavy, is made by Bretherton's direction just another conventional western villain. Claude King, as an Englishman rancher, gives a touch of dignity to the picture's personnel.

I might have sat down on the visitor's side of Harry Sherman's desk and in a fatherly way told him all I have said above, but he would have smiled genially at me and paid no attention to me. It pains me to lecture him in public, but it is the only way I can make him listen. He is one of the nicest fellows I know.

### *Comedy a Handicap*

THE LAW IN HER HANDS, a First National picture. Directed by William Clemens; assistant director, Drew Ebersson; screen play by George Bricker and Luci Ward; original by George Bricker; dialogue director, Gus Shy; photography by Sid Hickox; film editor, Clarence Kolster; art director, Esdras Hartley; gowns by Orry-Kelly; supervisor, Bryan Foy. Cast: Margaret Lindsay, Glenda Farrell, Warren Hull, Lyle Talbot, Eddie Acuff, Dick Purcell, Al Shean, Joseph Crehan, Matty Fain, Addison Richards, Milt Kibbee, Eddie Shubert, Mabel Colcord, Billy Wayne.

ONE thing I cannot understand about these class B pictures is why most of them are aimed deliberately at class B audiences. Studio belief that anything is good enough for a dual bill is costing producers a lot of money. Here we have a story with basic qualities to make it interesting to the most intelligent audience, but it is made to carry a load of "comedy relief" which limits its appeal to those with an elemental sense of humor and lacking a sense of drama. The same intelligence that could appreciate the dramatic significance of the situations developed by the story, would spurn the laborious comedy without story value injected to amuse it, but which serves only to destroy the mood the picture could create if given half a chance.

Still, *The Law in Her Hands* has its points, although Bryan Foy, who produced it for Warners, has given us a lot of better pictures. Its premise is interesting—a couple of girls graduating in law and trying to make a living in practicing it. George Bricker, author of the original story, and Luci Ward, who collaborated with him in writing the screen play, display ability in laying a trail of events which make it seem plausible that Margaret Lindsay and Glenda Farrell should drift into shyster practice.

Margaret makes a rather engaging lawyer, so engaging that one can understand why a jury would be swayed quite as much by her beauty and personality as by her eloquence and logic. And Glenda, who cares little where the money comes from as long as it keeps coming, rounds out the legal firm into one audiences will like.

There is a nice romance between Margaret and Warren Hull, one of our most agreeable young leading men; as well as a whole lot of gangster deviltry by Lyle Talbot and henchmen, several spirited court scenes, and a big punch to wind things up. If the comedy by Eddie Acuff had been left out and the audience been permitted to keep in the mood created by the premise of the story, the picture would give general satisfaction.

### *A Metro Masterpiece*

THE GREAT ZIEGFELD, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Produced by Hunt Stromberg; directed by Robert Z. Leonard; screen play by William Anthony McGuire; dances and ensembles staged by Seymour Felix; special music and lyrics by Walter Donaldson and Harold Adamson; Harriet Hocter Ballet Music by Con Conrad; lyrics by Herb Magidson; musical direction by Arthur Lange; arrangements by Frank Skinner; art direction by Cedric Gibbons; associates, Merrill Pye, John Harkrider and Edwin B. Willis; gowns and fashion parades by Adrian; photographed by Oliver T. Marsh, George Folsey, Karl Freund, Ray June and Merritt B. Gerstad; recording director, Douglas Shearer; film editor, William S. Gray; produced by Hunt Stromberg. Cast: William Powell, Myrna Loy, Luise Rainer, Frank Morgan, Fannie Brice, Virginia Bruce, Reginald Owen, Ray Bolger, Ernest Cossart, Joseph Cawthorn, Nat Pendleton, Harriet Hocter, Jean Chatburn, Paul Irving, Herman Bing, Charles Judels, Marcelle Corday, Raymond Walburn, A. A. Trimble, Buddy Doyle.

Reviewed by ALLAN HERSHOLT

**A** GAIN Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer adds an important chapter to the history of motion pictures, this time with an offering which, to my knowledge, marks the highest spot the cinema has reached in entertainment, an offering which gives the screen new dignity as an art and which is of much value to Hollywood as a subject for study.

*Ziegfeld* presents an extraordinary exhibition of motion picture mechanics. And it is a film with a soul, a living thing, with all of the wonderful opportunities for poignant humanness taken advantage of. Into each scene has been put pictorial quality in perfect harmony with its mood, outstanding examples being those which occur in Ziegfeld's death-room. In that final sequence of the film is a shot that stands out more vividly in my mind than any other. It is a simple one, showing us merely a semidark room in which Ziegfeld, his back to the camera, sits facing a window through which is seen an electric sign that reads "Ziegfeld Theatre." The shot tells us that he, his money, his youth, his health gone, never will arise from the chair. Watching it, my eyes filled with tears and a lump came to my throat. Apparently the director realized the importance of camera and lighting to the creation of drama in that shot and in many others as well.

Long have I felt that close-ups are detrimental to a picture unless inserted only when there are demands for them. Why? Many scenes on the screen can be presented perfectly only if they include all of the composition necessary to them. For example, when a character's position in relation to another character is important to a scene, some of its strength is lost when the other character is eliminated to allow the first to be shown in a closeup. Some of the most dramatic scenes in *Ziegfeld* are presented in medium and long shots. This is logical treatment, and rare, too, unfortunately. *Ziegfeld* gives us close-ups only when they are essential.

To all associated with this remarkable production belongs warm praise. Its director, the veteran Robert Z. Leonard, has accomplished a truly great, beautiful, unforgettable job, surely his finest achievement. At no time has he permitted conventionalities to take part. William Powell's Ziegfeld comes as his most brilliant portrayal, as one of the very greatest the screen has offered in the past decade. It is a performance from which many of our most successful stars may learn something of the art of acting. And Luise Rainer! What a treat viewing her characterization is! As Anna Held, she runs the gamut of human emotions. Her spontaneity, her moods, changing like the chameleon changes colors, her dramatic feeling and expression, her moments of joy, romance and insouciance, her nuances of pathos mark her as a great actress, second to none.

Myrna Loy is utterly convincing and charming as Billie Burke. Frank Morgan, playing Ziegfeld's friend and rival showman, contributes his customary performance, which, of course, means he is splendid. Fannie Brice, appearing briefly as herself, supplies very amusing humor. Ray Bolger's eccentric dancing stands out eminently and he discloses fine talent for farcical comedy. Jean Chatburn, a pretty newcomer, shines in a small, unimportant role. The renowned Harriet Hocter dances beautifully in a ballet number, but is given no opportunity to display histrionic ability.

Such always-capable players as Virginia Bruce, Reginald Owen, Ernest Cossart, Nat Pendleton, Joseph Cawthorn, Herman Bing, Charles Judels and Raymond Walburn offer characterizations of genuine sincerity and conviction. A. A. Trimble plays Will Rogers and bears amazing resemblance in appearance and manner to the beloved humorist. Buddy Doyle's Eddie Cantor is good.

The William Anthony McGuire screen play is a quite extraordinary accomplishment, one of the most intelligently executed jobs since pictures began to speak. The dances and ensembles, the staging of them credited to Seymour Felix, are gorgeous, unique creations, presented with camera-employment of rare intelligence. Five of the screen's finest cameramen, Oliver Marsh, George Folsey, Karl Freund, Ray June and Merritt Gerstad, worked on the film, Marsh photographing the story and the others musical numbers. Each has done superbly. The chief art director, Cedric Gibbons, and his clever associates, Merrill Pye, John Harkrider and Edwin Willis, cannot be commended too highly for their settings, which are responsible to a considerable degree for the tremendous success of the production.

Altogether excellent are the ballet music and lyrics by Con Conrad and Herb Magidson and the Walter Donaldson-Harold Adamson special music and lyrics. Arthur Lange's musical direction and the arrangements by Frank Skinner stand out as the most impressive in many months. One person who has contributed largely to the success of *Ziegfeld* is William Gray, film editor. His is an uncommonly smooth, intelligent job of cutting. The gowns and fashion parades, credited to Adrian, are strikingly effective.

*Ziegfeld*, without question, is the outstanding motion picture to come from its producer, Hunt Stromberg, whose record includes numerous magnificent screen crea-

tions. The picture runs over three hours, during which time it never fails to have the high admiration and undivided attention of its spectators. It provided me with my finest experience in a theatre. Never, I am certain, shall I forget it.

(The Editor's comments on the Great Ziegfeld will be found on page 3.)

### Director and Writers Shine

THE BIG NOISE, a Warner Bros. picture. Directed by Frank McDonald; assistant director, Dick Maybery; screen play by George Bricker and William Jacobs; original by Edward Hartman; photography by L. Wm. O'Connell; art director, Carl Jules Weyl; film editor, Terry Morse; supervisor, Bryan Foy. Cast: Guy Kibbee, Warren Hull, Alma Lloyd, Dick Foran, Marie Wilson, Henry O'Neill, Olin Howland, Virginia Brissac, William Davidson, Andre Beranger, Edward McWade, Robert Emmett Keane, Al Hill, Eddie Shubert, William Pawley, George Lloyd, Emmett Vogan.

Reviewed by ALLAN HERSHOLT

DESPITE the familiarity of its plot and the illogical nature of some situations, this B-group offering manages to be a picture different and entirely believable. Produced under the capable supervision of Bryan Foy, it is fine entertainment and overshadows considerably numerous screen efforts of similar character. It is the intelligent treatment, the indescribable effectiveness of many incidental scenes, the several highly humorous, richly human moments that make the film a work of marked quality, in spite of the handicaps supplied by its story.

Primarily this is a victory for the director, Frank McDonald, and for the authors of the screen play, George Bricker and William Jacobs. Wisely McDonald has introduced no unique appliances in the telling of his story, his style being simple, smooth, brisk. Disclosed in the direction is an unusual perception of comedy values and humanness. And the acting is noteworthy proof of McDonald's adroitness in bringing out latent talent of players. Notably is that evidenced in the instance of Warren Hull, who will gain greatly by this picture. It is a fine script which Bricker and Jacobs have contributed, possessing much humor—sparkling, delightful and spontaneous.

*Big Noise* presents an American family, Guy Kibbee playing the father, Virginia Brissac the mother, and Alma Lloyd the daughter. Kibbee's is a skilled impersonation, one of his most pleasing. Miss Lloyd, an appealing and intelligent actress, gives a performance which convinces me she will go far in her screen career. This is the first time I have seen Warren Hull give a polished portrayal, heretofore his work having lacked technical finish. That Marie Wilson is one of our most charming comediennes no one will doubt after seeing her performance in this film. It is far and away her best effort.

A highlight of the picture is Edward McWade's characterization. Seen in but one sequence, he is splendid. Virginia Brissac, Dick Foran and William Davidson do excellently, and the other players, particularly Henry O'Neill, Olin Howland, William Pawley, George Lloyd and Andre Beranger give performances that are outstanding. L. W. O'Connell's camera, as usual, brings fine results.

### It Has Its Weaknesses

THE MINE WITH THE IRON DOOR, Principal Productions, Columbia release. Directed by David Howard; produced by Sol Lesser; from the novel by Harold Bell Wright; adaptation and screen play by Don Swift and Dan Jarrett; photography by Frank B. Good, A.S.C.; operative cameraman, Joe Novak; art direction, Ben Carre and Lewis J. Rachmil; assistant director, George Sherman; sound engineer, Earl Crain; film editor, Arthur Hilton. Cast: Richard Arlen, Cecilia Parker, Henry B. Walthall, Stanley Fields, Spencer Charters, Charles Wilson, Barbara Hedford, Horace Murphy.

Reviewed by PAUL JACOBS

MANY years ago, this story was done as a silent. Stark, vivid, powerful, it left an indelible impression on the audience. This version will be forgotten by the time one leaves the theatre. Why? Because the elements with which audience-attention is bought and sustained, are lacking. Menace, the life-blood of all westerns, does not appear until late in the story. Effort and counter-effort between hero and villain are almost desultory; suspense is not introduced actively until the last fifteen minutes. Humorous dialogue, clever but detrimental to swift forward movement, carries the first half, almost entirely without action. And the use of the locale, Arizona back-country, to lend emotional support is never attempted.

In essence, a picture is made interesting by its use of mood and tempo. In the book and in the original film, the mine, which has no actual door, but derives its name from the hematite formation of its entrance, is guarded by the sinister figure of Natachee, the Indian. Silouetted against the grim panorama of untamed wilderness, his wild grace epitomizes the ruthless splendor of the elements, and the drama of a white man's bewildered attempt to wrest from these fundamental forces their guarded secret. In this very much talkie, a college professor adjusts his precise cravat, pulls up a chair in front of the closet which hides the entrance to a real iron door, sits down and delivers a sermon on the unfortunate effects of greed. And therein lies the difference between a gripping action story of the west, and this anemic remake.

But there are compensations. Frank Good's photography is pleasing, and he achieves several remarkable effects in candle light. Considering the script with which he had to work, David Howard gave a creditable job of directing. I would very much like to see him do a picture of the real West. Richard Arlen has always been a favorite of mine, representing America's idea of what a young man should be like. Never an actor, his personality lends strength to any out-door film. Celia Parker is appealing as Spencer Charter's daughter, and the outstanding performance by Henry B. Walthall is typical of this excellent old master. His eyes pull the entire audience into his inner emotions. He was far better than the picture he worked in. A fine bit was contributed by Horace Murphy. Stanley Field was well cast as a dumb detective with gold fever.

In total, without the title to mislead the avid western fan, this picture is mildly pleasing, giving intelligent attention to detail, and offering as much as any secondary production is, apparently, supposed to give.

## Grim Entertainment

**HUMAN CARGO**, 20th Century-Fox. Executive producer, Sol M. Wurtzel; directed by Allan Dwan; screen play by Jefferson Parker and Doris Malloy; based on the novel *I WILL BE FAITHFUL*, by Kathleen Shepard; photography, Daniel B. Clark, A.S.C.; art direction, Duncan Cramer; assistant director, Samuel Schneider; film editor, Louis Loeffler; costumes, William Lambert; sound, Alfred Bruzlin and Harry Leonard; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Claire Trevor, Brian Donlevy, Alan Dinehart, Ralph Morgan, Helen Troy, Rita Cansino, Morgan Wallace, Herman Bing, John McGuire, Ralf Harolde, Wade Boteler, Harry Wood.

Reviewed by PAUL JACOBS

**T**HIS one will pull you to the edge of your seat and keep you there. *Human Cargo* is a tense, thrill-packed story of alien-smuggling. Spangled with scintillating performances, there is not an unconvincing moment; and five people deserve particular credit. To Allan Dwan goes sincere congratulations and the suggestion that this is the psychological time to ask for a raise. He has achieved the ultimate in directorial effectiveness: smoothly progressive filmic rhythm, producing out of itself and its subtle handling, the goal of every picture, a complete and attention-commanding illusion of stark reality.

Particularly significant is the work of Jefferson Parker and Doris Malloy. They have turned out a screen play which deftly embodies the fundamentals of dramatic law. From humorous opening to nerve-jerking climax, *Human Cargo* builds an increasing suspense which lets the audience rest only at the story's dictate, and only long enough to catch a hasty breath.

The most convincing portrayal I have seen this year is that of Brian Donlevy as the two-fisted, fast-thinking ace-reporter. Donlevy is star material. He imbues his work with an indefinable quality of genuineness which immediately convinces the audience that this is no motion picture, but a slice out of a very interesting life. His cinematic progress will be worth watching.

And now for an old favorite in a new role. Alan Dinehart, no longer filmdom's number one nasty man, gives us a cracking good characterization of what the public expects its newspaper editors to be. As head of a big daily, Dinehart's interpretation offers delightful proof of his ability to handle any role.

Claire Trevor performs prettily, adding picquant flavor, as the poor little rich girl who decides, in the way of most women, that domesticity is more fun than attempting to beat her heart's choice to the scoop. The entire cast is thoroughly capable, each minor part blending smoothly into a well-knit whole. Helen Troy, as the tongue wiggling switch-girl, Rita Casino as the tragic little dancer who trusts too implicitly in the protection of the law, Herman Bing, as a romantically-minded sailor—the list of adroitly handled support includes every name in the cast.

As in every production, the executive head deserves censure or praise in exact ratio of the merit his picture earns. Congratulations to Sol M. Wurtzel.

**WHEN YOU SEE** a long-bearded man in Hollywood, you may safely place a bet that he either is in pictures or has a weak chin.

## New York in Rhyme

**T**HIS is something picked out of Betsy Beaton's *The New York Spectacle* and given a place by itself. Betsy wrote the following explanatory note which reveals the source of the poet's inspiration: "New York has many architectural oddities and incongruities. One of them, a recently erected church on upper Broadway, is just about the last word in urban befuddlement, and we herewith present a memorandum in verse inspired by this monstrous mass. The poem is by a young man we know."

## LAMENT

By FRED STEIN

With much research on every hand  
In this our poor misguided land,  
I now begin to understand  
The modern point of view.

The cocktail takes the place of wine,  
Our creed condenses to a line:  
"Discordance with despatch combine,"  
The mess we get is new.

At last the boy composers gloat.  
Although our ears rebel each note,  
The music wasn't writ by rote—  
Cacophony is Art.

No whit outdone the modern bard.  
His rhythm and his rhymes are hard,  
For meaning he has no regard,  
And so he plays his part.

No plane to painter is denied.  
He shows his nude from every side  
And then, not fully satisfied,  
The nervous system adds.

The decorator's work should be  
A lesson, Mother Earth, to thee—  
Recall this fearful progeny,  
And give us simpler lads.

In life we illustrate as well  
The modern spirit's mighty spell.  
Let someone else the story tell—  
I pause but little here,

Although I'll mention, for the nonce,  
That modern man is but a dunce  
Unless he does six things at once  
Throughout his mad career.

Yet some, I thought, will bear the light  
To lead our erring souls aright  
Through all this modernistic night,  
And I was undismayed.

But when, to-day, by chance I passed  
Manhattan Church, I stood aghast,  
And, ever standing, knew at last  
That I had been betrayed.

In fully exemplary blend  
The structure shows the modern trend,  
For where the vaulted arches end  
The duplex suites begin.

The congregation's prayers arise  
To God our Father in the skies  
As disinfectant, I surmise,  
Through twenty floors of sin.

**JUST OCCURRED TO ME** that I have not seen a picture which staged a scene in an automobile parking place. Something should be done about it.

# If it is worth reading at all, It is worth reading regularly

## In Hollywood

**Jesse L. Lasky:** My heartiest greetings and good wishes to Welford Beaton's Hollywood Spectator, which has been a constructive force in the industry for the past decade. May it enjoy more decades of success and prosperity.

## In San Francisco

**The Argonaut:** Beaton is one of the most competent as well as the most courageous, candid and conscientious of all film critics; one who knows as much and seems to care more for the present and future of cinematic art than any other critic.

## In Cleveland

**Plaindealer:** The Spectator's intelligence may and should be rated higher than that of any other publication dealing exclusively with photoplays.

## In New York

**The Post:** It is most agreeable to find an eastern critic who is familiar with the work of Welford Beaton, editor of The Spectator. This clever, practical and witty critic has hammered more sense into the heads of motion picture directors than any man of recent years.

## In Boston

**Christian Science Monitor:** The Hollywood Spectator is a reliable and searching West Coast screen publication.

## In London

**Evening News:** Welford Beaton, the most enlightened and broadminded film critic in America.

## In Berlin

**Der Deutsche:** No other writer in Europe or America has such a fine grasp of film fundamentals or the ability to present them so convincingly.

## In Perth, Australia

**Daily News:** An opinion from such a medium can be taken with an even greater degree of sincerity, seeing that Beaton is a sincere believer in what he writes.

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**S P E C T A T O R**

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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**THE EDITOR**

Threshes over old straw and sets forth comprehensively his Declaration of Cinematic Principles.

**PAUL JACOBS**

Takes screen art apart and discusses in a scholarly manner the rules which govern it.

**FRED STEIN**

Writes from New York about various things; among others, a picture which caught his fancy.

**AND REVIEWS OF**

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From the

# Editor's Easy Chair



*The Editor, his pipe drawing well, thinks this morning it would be a good idea to gather together vagrant thoughts expressed at scattered intervals in previous SPECTATORS, and incorporate them in what might be termed a Declaration of Cinematic Principles, Revised and Amplified Edition. As you read, you will find things you have read in these pages before, but their repetition is necessary to give coherence to the new thoughts based on them. If you disagree with his reasoning, it would please him greatly if you would write and tell him so. In fact, if so many of you wrote that he could fill a SPECTATOR with your writings, he would be grateful to you and would go away somewhere and fish.*

LET'S GET ONE THING straight. The SPECTATOR's one concern is the box-office. The impression seems to prevail that it wants pictures to go back to silence. It does not. It wants pictures to go back to the box-office. The film industry was made prosperous in the first place by a form of entertainment unlike any previously offered the public. When that form was superseded by one totally different in its fundamentals, the public's habit of attendance at picture houses was broken. In the silent days one feature and a few shorts composed programs which satisfied picture patrons. Now exhibitors have to present two features, some shorts, and give away a lot of money to attract audiences. Producers have to make almost twice as many pictures as formerly to bring the same returns to the box-office. That is not a healthy condition. There must be a reason for it. The only reason the SPECTATOR can ascribe is the fundamental change in the nature of the picture product being offered. It cannot believe in one decade there could be a revolution in the thought process of the public of sufficient magnitude to cause such a complete revolution in the business of exhibiting motion pictures, that in such a short time the demands of the public could swing from one feature and a few shorts to two features, shorts, bank nights, and give-aways of every nature. In pleading for the restitution of the screen principles which caused the industry's first prosperity, the SPECTATOR is credited with a desire to see the sound device thrown away and a return to wholly silent pictures. This miscomprehension of our opinions, however, is of importance to the SPECTATOR only. Of importance to the entire film industry are the basic principles underlying such opinions, irrespective of who expresses them.

\* \*

LET US FIRST take apart the one silent picture with which the public used to be content, the form of entertain-

ment that swept the world and gained a popularity never even approached in magnitude by any other form. It was silent. That is significant only because it forced the screen to tell its stories in pictorial terms. There was nothing new in the stories themselves. All the basic situations in them appeared in literature and drama a score of centuries ago. The public's instant reception of screen offerings as its favorite form of entertainment, therefore can be ascribed only to the screen's method of retelling the old stories. For the first time in history the stories were told with pictures which moved, which the public could see passing before its eyes, shadows which the imagination of the audience made real, *imagination*, not the brain of the audience. It was not asked to exercise its intellect in following the story. In fact, it could not exercise its intellect except subjectively, the objective material the screen offered being used merely as material for fashioning the subjective impressions the imagination conveyed to the intellect. The importance of this to the silent picture was that it made it a form of dramatic entertainment which, for the first time in the history of such entertainment, enabled the audience to follow it and at the same time to enjoy a complete mental rest. The imagination, not the intellect, functioned. That explains the universal appeal of the screen, as each imagination fashioned its own entertainment. The complete mental rest explains the habit of picture attendance. After a hard day at the office, the film theatre offered both rest and entertainment.

\* \*

NOW LET US TAKE a talkie apart and see what it is made of, in what respect it differs with the one picture which used to suffice. The first thing we find is that it has two advantages over the silent picture: it can express audibly the titles which formerly were printed on the film; and it can provide musical scores, which for both psychological and physiological reasons, which we will not go into now, are an essential element of screen entertainment. If film producers are the astute businessmen they pride themselves upon being, their first care when given the sound device would have been to retain the elements responsible for the extraordinary success silent pictures attained and to use the new element to make them even more entertaining. But not having business acumen enough to grasp the importance of studying their medium to discover the reason for its success, they were ignorant of its appeal and proceeded to banish from the screen all the elements which had made it great and substitute for them new elements not even remotely related to the fundamental principles of their entertainment medium. For silence they substituted noise, for emotional appeal they substituted intel-

lectual appeal, they eliminated the imagination as a factor, and did not take advantage of the opportunity to provide their picture with the musical scores essential to their complete enjoyment by the people who patronize them. Their folly made double features and bank nights essential to the continued existence of the business. They persist in producing pictures which are harder to make than those which would have greater box-office value. They continue to make a film theatre a place of mental exercise instead of what it used to be, a place for mental rest.

\* \*

LET US SUPPOSE we always have had talkies, that there never was such a thing as a silent picture, that stories always have been told on the screen in dialogue; let us indulge in a wild flight of fancy by supposing the film industry is dominated by men who have some knowledge of the fundamentals of the business they are in. One of those men begins to think, we will suppose. For their enjoyment talkies demand strict attention; customers have to listen to them. How about giving them more to see and less to hear? He tells his writers to write more for the camera and less for the microphone; to make the screen a pictorial instead of an oral art; to give it emotional instead of intellectual appeal. Being the possessor of something to think with, he would realize the silent stretches in pictures needed something to relieve them, and he would engage composers to give them continuous scores. In short, he would put into his product everything silent pictures contained, save only the printed titles, which would be expressed by the sound device. He would find the elimination of the necessity for dialogue would be a simple matter of developing camera technique and directorial methods, combined with the intelligent use of music, to make it necessary for the audience to hear only the essential speeches. Is there anyone in the industry brainless enough to contend that this man's product would not score more heavily at the box-office than that of his competitors who continued to make the kind of talkies we are getting now? Is there anyone ass enough to deny that this man's product immediately would be imitated by all his competitors? There are such brainless asses—too many of them. That is why there seems little prospect of one of them making something for the others to imitate.

\* \*

THE TALKIE AUDIENCE is increasing slightly as general business becomes more prosperous, but till the attendance is fifty million less per week than it was at the peak of the talkies' popularity, is still below what had become the normal silent picture attendance. Every expedient is resorted to to stimulate attendance. Million dollar productions have become common, box-office stars are rushed from one production to another until their box-office values are diminishing, and everyone who achieves prominence on the stage is pressed into screen service on the assumption, born of ignorance of both, that the stage and the screen are similar arts. Intelligence is not displayed even in the making of the kind of pictures Hollywood is making. In *Bullets or Ballots*, one of Warner Brothers' important productions, the foreman of the grand jury threatens the police commissioner with dismissal unless within a specified time a murder case is cleared up. The commissioner is a sympathetic character; we like him, are on his side. The scene derives its strength from two ele-

ments, the speech and the reaction to it. The microphone can register the speech and the camera can register the reaction, thus enabling the audience to get the strength of the two elements simultaneously. But what we have is a close-up of the foreman for the full length of the speech, and never a glimpse of the commissioner's reaction, the matter of major importance to us. Infants make more intelligent use of their mechanical toys than some picture people do of the sound device. But the screen will muddle through somehow. Its inherent strength is great enough to enable it to survive the punishment it is now receiving.

\* \*

NOW LET US CLARIFY the SPECTATOR'S objection to the use of color in feature pictures. We have argued it from the standpoint of motion picture art, a line of argument which can get nowhere in Hollywood, as the only people who recognize there is such an art and are acquainted in a measure with its fundamentals, do not hold positions which enable them to apply the principles of the art to the creations which bear its label. Let us, then, forget art and consider color in its relation to the box-office. The business of the film industry is the sale to the public of screen entertainment in the form of stories. No such story can give satisfaction, can earn the word-of-mouth advertising which makes it a successful commercial venture, unless it holds the attention of the audience, unless it is sufficiently entertaining to keep audience attention continuously on the fate of the people whose affairs it is relating. Obviously, the easiest way to accomplish this is to avoid the intrusion of distractions, to give the audience nothing except the story to think about and make all its individual elements unobtrusive as possible. Photography, as one of the most important elements, must not be given such prominence as disturbs the harmony of the whole by virtue of attracting attention to itself and away from the story. The ideal photography to gain the desired end is that in gradations from black to white. It can achieve sufficient beauty to add esthetic value to such scenes as are strengthened by it, thus being absorbed by the story and becoming part of it. Beauty on its own account is a disturbing element in a screen creation.

\* \*

COLOR IS A DECIDED distraction. The greater perfection it attains, the more arresting its beauty becomes, the more will it lessen the box-office value of pictures containing it by attracting attention to itself and diverting the attention of the audience from the one thing the film industry has to sell—stories which derive their commercial value solely from their power to hold attention. Shakespeare's question about liquor—"Why do men put poison in their mouths to steal away their brains?"—might be paraphrased: Why do producers put poison in their pictures to steal away their box-office value? Yet they do it, deliberately and at greatly increased cost to their pictures. The folly of it is on a par with the folly of "comedy relief" to induce laughter where there should be none. The mood of a screen creation is what holds it together and assures unbroken continuity of audience interest in the incidents of which it is composed. It is the preservation of the mood, therefore, which gives a picture its box-office value, which makes it talked about and earn profits for its makers. The mood of a screened story is set by its internal elements, its human quality, its power to make us

laugh, cry or thrill. None of these is even remotely related to such a purely external element as color photography. Just as the audience, to derive entertainment from a motion picture, must imagine the shadows on the screen are real people, so can it imagine the black and white shades are real colors. The strength of screen entertainment is the play it gives the imagination, the illusion of reality it creates. Reality breaks the illusion, yet the film industry applauds the efforts of Technicolor to achieve even greater reality in its color process.

\* \* \*

HERE AND THERE: Major distributing companies ran counter to President Roosevelt's wishes when they refused to releas *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, a three-reeler, on the ground that it was New Deal propaganda; now film barons are fearful lest the Administration do something to them by way of getting even; when it is a case of politics, however, Will Hays' long training in the game will be instrumental in warding off the blows; where there's a Will, there's a way. . . . There seems to be no end to the number of cherries I can eat. . . . It always has been the contention of the SPECTATOR that the screen is not an acting art, that a stage actor has to learn his business all over again before he can be successful as a screen actor; the able editor of *Film Weekly*, London, refers to the success of three children, Bonita Granville, Freddie Bartholomew, and Nova Pilbeam, and goes on to say: "Where these youngsters score over players of far greater experience is in the freshness of their approach to the screen. They have not been highly trained in a technique that belongs to the theatre. This, combined with their natural talent, gives them a tremendous advantage over the hundreds of screen players who were originally schooled in stage acting, and have either never been able to outgrow it, or have never fully realized how very different are the demands of the camera." . . . A star residing at the Beverly Wilshire told the management he would stay on if the hotel would change its telephone number. . . . With as much money as has been given Franklin D. Roosevelt to spend, the most inefficient president ever elected to office could make his administration achieve the same phoney semblance of efficiency the present administration has attained. . . . In the old home he was making over, the young screen writer was reading to his bride and me the first draft of the screen play he was working on; the maid came to the door and announced that the gentlemen had called about the termites; the bride frowned: "Nora," she said, "tell the gentlemen we don't need any." . . . Probably the greatest pull-together spirit ever existing on a lot was that of Paramount when it was on Vine Street; Jesse Lasky was responsible; nearest thing to it to-day is MGM; Adolph Zukor and Bill Le Baron will bring it back to Paramount, but it will take a long pull.

\* \* \*

WALDEMAR YOUNG made a place beside me at a Beverly Derby booth by shunting me out of his way. As a startling innovation in the choice of a conversational subject hereabouts, we began to talk about pictures. I recalled one I had seen long ago, *The Unholy Three*, with Lon Chaney, Mae Busch and Vic McLaglen. Wally seemed greatly interested so I went on to tell him some of the scenes. He broke in with: "Universal made that picture

twelve years ago, and as far I know it is the only one for which but one script was written, which was shot from the first draft of the screen play. I wrote it, and have written heaven knows how many more, but *Unholy Three* was the only one shot without revision of even one line." As I mused over the thing on the way home, I sought the reason why, after seeing thousands of pictures since then, I could remember the story of one I had seen a dozen years ago. Nowadays it sometimes is difficult to recall one I saw last week. Obviously this Universal production must have had qualities few others attain. Could there be any connection between its high rating as screen entertainment and the fact of its being shot exactly as the writer prepared the story when his enthusiasm for it was at its peak?

\* \* \*

THE *Unholy Three* expressed one mind, that of the writer as interpreted by the director. To-day no picture is shot before the script has been revised several times. As it reaches the screen it is the expression of several minds, and seldom does it reflect in film form the enthusiasm the scenarist had for the story when he first approached the task of writing the screen play. Its life is drained from it by all those who meddle with it. I was not interested enough to acquaint myself with what writers were fighting for or against in the recent interval of storm and strife, but if they would start another war for emancipation, I would be for them. It is the man whose work to-day is manhandled by every one who comes in contact with it, who to-morrow will be the dictator—the writer of the screen play. It will be his enthusiasm, the eagerness of his approach, his zest for creation that will put box-office value in motion pictures. We have plenty now who can prepare scripts which revision only can weaken; if they were recognized, we soon would have many more. The screen really is a writer's art. Eventually writers must dominate it. Under the present system few writers, with knowledge of what will happen to their scripts, can maintain the enthusiasm that should reach the screen. We should not judge their mental strength by what the public sees of their work, but rather by the fact that they do not go crazy.

\* \* \*

OF A NUMBER of things: Being a good actor sometimes limits an actor's career; Skeets Gallagher, with all the qualifications necessary to the making of a successful leading man, was so good as a light comedian that he never was given an opportunity to become anything else. . . . In her next picture Paramount has an opportunity to redeem itself insofar as Gladys Swarthout is concerned; she has everything to give her a place beside Jeanette MacDonald and Irene Dunne as a successful singing star with human qualities; she even is capable of living down the first two pictures in which Paramount presented her, and that will be going some. . . . At previews I get the tail end of pictures I have seen before; several times have caught John Wray's emotional scene in *Mr. Deeds*; each time impressed me more with it; glad to see Frank Capra has lifted the bushel under which Wray's ray was hidden. . . . The country is getting them; I was present at a gathering of prominent screen people in San Fernando Valley; they did not talk pictures, believe it or not; their serious concern was where to get the best corn to plant. . . . A book still standing out in my memory among

all those I read as a boy is *Coral Island*, by R. M. Banatyne. . . . Why not dub all those under long term contracts to studios as "termites"? . . . Motored past a gospel tent; a dozen huge signs, all but one bearing scriptural texts exploiting the comfort of Godly living; the one read: LOCK YOUR CARS. . . . Most of the Vitaphone shorts are so bad that all the satisfaction they give audiences is opportunities to hiss. . . . Saturday, June 20, *Daily News* station, KRKD, 12:15 P.M. Mrs. Leo B. Hedges, state motion picture chairman, Parent-Teachers Association, is going to ask me a lot of questions about motion pictures. . . . Warner Baxter wants to play Cisco Kid just once more; wants the Kid to die at the end of the picture and stay dead forever after. . . . Producers of *Bullets or Ballots* were so intent on making a good picture that only at rare intervals they remembered to bring in Frank McHugh to stop the story with comedy antics.

### Whiskers and Screen Art

PICTURE producers hailed the sound camera gratefully because they saw it as an instrument that would enable them to make their pictures more realistic. In the old days an ambulance had to dash silently across the screen. Now its siren can scream. "A touch of realism," say the producers.

The art of the world for, lo, these many centuries has suffered from the lack of guiding minds such as those that today guide the destiny of screen art. What a lot of good bets the Old Masters overlooked!

Take whiskers. In galleries here and abroad I have seen hundreds of portraits of men with whiskers painted so faithfully, so realistically, that countless hours must have been spent almost in fitting each separate hair into its proper place.

The film producer who puts the scream into a motion picture would have shown the Old Masters what to do about whiskers. What's the use of painting them when they could be shaved off the faces of the sitters and stuck onto the canvases? The sitters then could remain seated and grow fresh sets.

The extreme care exercised by the artists in painting whiskers was for the purpose of making them look as real as possible. Very well, what set of painted whiskers could look as real on a canvas as a bunch plucked from the map of the model and stuck on with trustworthy glue?

And take horse hides. Rosa Bonheur spent heaven knows how much time painting real looking hides on the magnificent animals in her mammoth work. *The Horse Fair*, which hangs in the Metropolitan Museum, New York. If there had been a Hollywood to advise her, she merely would have bought a lot of horses, skinned them, tanned the hides and stuck 'em on the canvas.

When Hollywood puts in its pictures the scream of a siren, the voice of people, the roar of an airplane, it does so under the impression it is making its art more real. On the screen we see an ambulance dashing down the street; ahead of it people scurrying out of the way. To add the sound of the siren is a touch of realism that Hollywood maintains makes the scene complete.

However patiently the artist toils to make the whiskers appeal real, *he is a long way from attempting to make the*

*picture's viewers think they are real.*

Art does not strive to recreate reality. Its mission is to interpret reality without reaching beyond the limits of its medium. The artist knows he could stick real whiskers on the face of his subject, but he knows, too, that in doing so he would be going outside the limits of his medium, and when he does that, his creation ceases to be art.

All arts derive their strength from their limitations. If painters put real whiskers on faces, real buttons on costumes and real neck-laces around necks—all simple things to do—they would be achieving reality and destroying art.

Likewise, all artists derive their power from working within the limits of their mediums.

The screen is a definite art with laws as strict as those that govern all other arts, and it has strength in the degree that it observes its laws. Real sounds are as anachronistic as real whiskers on a painted portrait. The screen's medium is the camera whose mission is to present scenes that *become real in the imagination of the viewers.*

Just as real whiskers would emphasize the fact that the nose is painted, so does the sound of a siren emphasize the fact that the ambulance is a photograph, thus causing an artistic clash in the consciousness of the viewer. If a close-up of a hand working the handle of the siren were shown, then the scurrying crowd, the scene would be made complete by the viewer's imagination producing the noise.

Our film barons regard themselves as manufacturers and they point to the present satisfactory returns on some of their pictures as proof that they know their business. Anyone who lifts his voice on behalf of the screen as an art is regarded by them as a sissy. It is business, they argue, and there is no art about it.

The business of the film industry is to sell screen art to the public, and in the long run the industry will find out that the business can be stable only to the extent the art is pure. It is on the fundamentals of the art the business has reared its mighty world-wide structure, and continued ignoring of the fundamentals eventually must undermine the structure.

### She Likes Old-Timers

WRITES AMY H. CROUGHTON, in the Rochester (N.Y.) *Times-Union*:

"For a long time Welford Beaton, editor of THE HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR, dinned into the ears of picture producers the desirability of using actors and actresses of the earlier screen in character roles and bit parts. He argued that these people have the experience and skill, and that many of them—former stars, featured players, and character actors—had given of their best to the screen and were entitled to consideration. Moreover he believed the public would not only welcome their talent but would enjoy seeing them back as old friends.

"Mr. Beaton has a way of dinning ideas into the producers' ears with quiet persistency until they become convinced they thought them up all by themselves. Then they call in a publicity man and give the project to the public as their own. And Mr. Beaton really doesn't care, so long as the idea gets into practice. He even hopes to get the producers into the state of mind, some day, where they

will go back to telling their stories with the camera, instead of with dialogue, and announce the new technic to the public as a grand discovery of their unassisted intelligence.

"Not all players who have declined from their former importance as stars are willing to adapt themselves to taking small parts. None of them, perhaps, enjoys acting as 'atmosphere,' or going on in a bit part to speak a line or two in the heavy shadow of some youngster who was losing his rattle over the side of the crib when they were at the height of their power as stars. Some of them who first returned to the screen did so under other names. But the public and reviewers have been so sincerely cordial to old favorites that this feeling is decreasing. And then, too, the old actors, watching a preview of the film in which they are now appearing, must feel honest pride in the smoothness, finish and naturalness that their work gives in these supporting roles. The return of these experienced players contributes no small part to the general improvement of pictures now being released".

### Story of a Story

A PICTURE PRODUCER with whom I play golf at intervals when he hasn't a grouch on, told me, during our locker-room post mortem, that he was desperate for a story for an established girl star whose services he could get as soon as he could get the story set. I had a story idea in my head and told it to him. He liked it and told me to go ahead.

The story interested me. I worked it out in detail—down to the provoking flickers of the star's eyelashes. Then—just to see if I could do it—I put it into continuity with every camera angle and set-up, properly numbered—a job that under no circumstances will I ever tackle again.

I turned it in. My producer friend, his wife, and their production manager went into conference with me after they read it. A few suggestions were made regarding changes here and there, but I did not have to argue—they agreed among themselves that the changes would do more harm than good. Four such conferences were held. We blinked and frowned at one another, but no one could locate a weak spot in the story. Finally I got wise.

"I'll tell you what's the matter with you birds," I said to the male conferees when the wife was absent. "You think there is something immoral about buying a script and shooting it without making a whole lot of changes. You've pawed over this one for two weeks without being able to make a change, and it frightens you."

"I guess that's it," grinned the producer. "We'll shoot it as is. Give him his check."

And the check and I departed. I was satisfied that I would have a good picture to my credit, story, screen play, continuity, dialogue all my own.

The star got tied up in another production and my friend had a few weeks in which to worry about my story. He became suspicious of it. It was his inalienable right to bite holes in every story he bought and it worried him that he could find no places in my story to sink his teeth into. Something had to be done.

A famed team of writers was appealed to. They read the story. They could make big money by making changes,

and they made them. I didn't know anything about that, and I went to see the first rough cut with my upper vest buttons unfastened to permit me to stick out my chest. Afterwards I fastened the buttons and went into the producer's office. I told him if he dared put my name on that picture I would break his bloody neck.

He's a little guy.

\* \* \*

PRODUCERS DO A LOT of funny things. Herbert Rawlinson was a long time in silent pictures. An accomplished actor, he developed box-office strength. When the screen went talkie, producers, never having understood what made the cinematic wheels go around, convinced themselves that the sound device took them out of the motion picture business and put them in that of the stage. They ignored their own talent and flocked to Broadway in search of players. Rawlinson went to Broadway also, starred in several successful plays, made his name prominent. He has returned to Hollywood. With both stage and screen experience, with fame gained in each, a fine presence and a good voice, his only recent screen appearances have been in bits. What do producers want, anyway?

\* \* \*

PHILIP MOELLER, of the Theatre Guild, tried his hand at directing motion pictures and made a poor job of it. RKO is bringing him back to Hollywood to try again. If he fails this time, I can give Sam Briskin the names and addresses of several unemployed directors who can make good motion pictures without trying.

\* \* \*

CAREFULLY COMPILED statistics make an interesting study. I like statistics. For instance, for the last ten years I have kept a record of answers to a question I have put 20,000 times to screen players, the 20,000th being reached last Tuesday noon at the Vine Street Derby. The question: "How about your last picture?" The answer 19,997 times: "I had a lot of fun making it." Two didn't hear me and one was mad at me.

\* \* \*

IN ITS HARROWING search for new story material the film industry might do worse than to persuade Dr. Cecil Reynolds, the noted psychiatrist, to chart it a course in speculative philosophy. The things we know cannot interest us as much as the things we do not know. I spent half a night behind a guide who led me along every corridor and through every door behind the scenes in Radio City Music Hall, from the top scenery loft to the deepest depression scooped out to accommodate the massive machinery that is part of the huge institution's operating plant. Walking back to my hotel in the early morning, I saw a lone orchid in a florist's window; I gazed at it a long time and marvelled at it. But still more marvellous than an orchid is the human mind, the most intensive study of which serves only to lead the student into further obscurity. Los Angeles papers told us recently of a youth who bewildered a large gathering of doctors by writing accurately in an ancient language he never had studied, by describing the physical movements of people while his eyes were bandaged tightly, and performing other feats equally unexplainable. Dr. Reynolds has dramatized his own metaphysical experiences and the hypnotic experiments of other psychiatrists who are trying to fathom the obscure depths of the human mind. His play, *The Mystery of the*

*Broadwalk Asylum*, recently shown at Mayan Theatre, is a fascinating study, a sound dramatic structure that will hold the close attention of any audience. It is a scholarly exposition of what is known, made more interesting by causing us to wonder what lies beyond in the dark places into which puny man not yet has been able to carry light. Universal's metaphysical pictures proved entertaining. One made from Dr. Reynold's play should do well at the box-office.

\* \* \*

WHILE MOTION PICTURES themselves are objects of art, making them is a business. Viewing production as a business, the greatest producer is the one who makes the most money. Hal Wallis, production chief at Warner Brothers, interests me. He used to head the Warner publicity department, and my interest in him probably has its genesis in the fact of my having been a publicity director at one time in my writing career. Like all good publicity men, Hal lied about his product, extolled each production as the best ever, holding his nose with one set of fingers while the other set tapped out wild rhapsodies of cinematic perfection that did not exist. He did it so persuasively that ultimately Jack Warner, who sometimes does things to prove himself a canny lad, gave him a chance to make pictures—not the kind the studio was making, but the kind Hal persistently claimed it was making. The difference between the two kinds was vast. When he undertook the task of bridging it, the new production chief faced a tough job. He succeeded Darryl Zanuck, during whose last year at Warners the company's production loss was \$6,291,748.46, really a hefty deficit for Hal to face. During his first year he reduced the loss to the less menacing figure of \$2,530,513.68. At the end of the second year accountants put the top on the red inkwell and wrote \$674,158.96 in black ink, quite a big plus when compared with the six and a quarter million minus. It was about half way through his second year that he went from red to black, the first quarter of 1935 showing a loss of \$133,515. Hall now is in his third year, the first quarter of which shows a profit of \$1,976,245.42. I am not acquainted with his working methods, but I suspect he goes through the publicity department files, fishes out something he wrote, and tells his associate producers he wants pictures just like that one. Anyway, however he does it, his record is a brilliant one.

\* \* \*

NOAH BEERY is cutting quite a swath in British pictures. It is about time Hollywood sent a scout over there to discover him. And it is about time someone here was discovering Noah Beery, Jr. He is a lad who will go a long way when he gets his chance.

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JACK ALICOATE is doing the film industry a valuable service by publishing in pamphlet form the suggestions to producers, exhibitors, and publicity men expressed by the newspaper motion picture critics of this country and Canada. They appeared in *Film Daily*. I do not know how Jack plans to distribute the pamphlet when it appears, but everyone engaged in making, exhibiting and exploiting pictures should see that he gets a copy. Newspaper critics can not express themselves freely when reviewing pictures for their publications. Film theatre managers are good advertisers. *Film Daily* offered the critics an opportunity

to get everything off their chests, and the keen grasp of screen fundamentals which most of them display, comes as a revelation. Studios should see that there is a copy of the pamphlet on every desk.

\* \* \*

THAT *Modern Times*, Charlie Chaplin's latest picture, is a flop seems to be the general impression in Hollywood. At all events, its box-office career has been held up to me scores of times as proof that the public no longer will accept silent technique. *To-day's Cinema* (London) says about the reception Europe is giving *Modern Times*: "Striking evidence of the universal popularity of Charlie Chaplin may be gathered from the reports received from the cities in which *Modern Times* has so far been shown. In London it has just concluded a thirteen-weeks' run at the Tivoli Theatre and has now moved into the Marble Arch Pavilion for a further extended run. Similar enthusiasm was evinced in Paris, where after eight weeks the picture is still drawing packed houses at the Marigny. Even Spain forgot its politics and bullfights to pay homage to "Carlos." The house record at the Tivoli, Barcelona (held by *City Lights*) was broken and a five-weeks' run registered. In Madrid the Capitol was crowded for four weeks. After four weeks Zurich is still laughing for more, while at Copenhagen the picture enters into its sixth week. Three weeks ago in Stockholm it had the most brilliant opening ever accorded a picture in Sweden, and is expected to run indefinitely."

\* \* \*

THERE WAS ONE STORY which John Ford for a long time wanted to direct, but studios did not think it important enough to take the time of such an important director. Jack's idea was to do something, obviously such a wise thing to do that one wonders why it did not occur to someone before. It was to tell a story, almost anyone would do as long as it was not a variant of the standard western story, against a Wild West background. Giving up hope of doing it himself, he developed the idea and sold it to RKO. Robert Sisk, associate producer, rose to it as a hungry trout does to a fly; assigned to John Twist and Jack Townley the task of writing it into a screen play which was handed to Christy Cabanne to direct, and it came to the screen as *The Last Outlaw*. Paul Jacobs reviewed it in the SPECTATOR of May 23. I viewed it last week. It interested me tremendously by virtue of the possibilities it suggests. It is quite an ordinary crook drama lifted from city streets and set down in the boundless West, one of Eastern crooks seeking refuge in Western plains and running foul of an old time outlaw and an old-time sheriff. Hollywood is given too much to shooting against walls in telling its stories. It would be wiser to shoot against the horizon. The screen is primarily a pictorial art, and no picture can equal those provided by the great outdoors. Producers face the dreary prospect of telling the old stories over again or shutting up shop. An easy way to make the old situations look new would be to transplant them in Western scenery and inject a dash of cowboy in them. Bob Sisk has shown how to do it. Even the most sophisticated stories would gain strength and flavor from the wisp of a western breeze.

\* \* \*

EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY women's hats are getting crazier and crazier.

# Taking the Cinematic Pulse

By  
Paul Jacobs

A MOTION picture, in essence, is the visual record of a struggle, a living, omniscient eye through which we peep into the intimate emotional depths of life—of particular lives. And every picture achieves greatness in ratio of the accuracy, perception and cohesion with which it unfolds its problem, draws the characters enmeshed in that problem and delineates the conditions which govern its solution.

First in importance is accurate characterization. Many otherwise fine stories are rendered implausible through inconsistent character-reaction. Each individual in every story must be understood by the audience; his psychological make-up subtly dissected and his behavior consistent with the mental and emotional traits previously assigned to him.

Thus when motivation, the life blood of dramatic action, is introduced it will synchronize with the characterizations from which it flows. The motives and desires of the hero immediately produce struggle or the forwarding movement when they clash with the counter-desire of the opposition, usually represented by another person. In better stories opposition often is placed in a subjective force: natural elements, social codes or, in fact, any barrier to the hero's goal capable of offering powerful and baffling counter-exertion. Struggle, physical in action stories; mental, spiritual, or emotional in social stories, is the basis of all drama.

Many times a picture is beautifully handled, brilliantly written, cleverly acted—and fails. Invariably it is because the tides of struggle are either insufficiently stressed, unimportant to the audience, or too obviously predetermined. We enjoy sports, gambling or business because we are fascinated by struggle. Remove it and audience interest dies.

Suspense will revive it. An uncertain audience is tense and eager. Consider the hero's goal as the centre of a pair of scales. On either side is the hero and the villain, or opposition. Each effort by either pulls the balance toward his eventual triumph. A good film will swing swiftly from one to the other with victory almost in the grasp of the hero, only to be lost by the desperate counter-action of the antagonist. And in any such crisis, use of the element of time is effective. The age-hoary drama of our hero fighting against great odds to reach the girl before she is cut in two by the villain's buzz saw, is crude but stark use of time.

Underlying the entire structure of suspense and struggle, is the necessity of applying them to an all-pervading goal. The object of the story, the bone of contention between protagonist and antagonist, must be of universal appeal and subject to universal understanding and sympathy, a goal everyone has sought, or a desire he appreciates.

Briefly, then, the audience wants a story of people it understands, of a goal it, too, would fight for, against people or conditions it has seen or fought against. The audience wants either a reflection of itself, or of its idealized self. Every good movie embodies these princi-

ples. Watch for them in the next picture you see and grade it accordingly.

## *Theme: the Filmic Heart*

NO MOTION picture is ever greater than its theme. Search back into the files of your memory and review the few films which have remained undimmed through the years. What quality has set them apart? Invariably analysis will point to the powerful life-truth around which each story was built. A motion picture is a series of impressions; the total of these impressions, each building toward the collective, single and all-prevailing thought which motivates each incident in every sequence, reiterates and propounds the theme; the total effect is to insinuate this basic concept into the subconscious mind, solidifying its impression into clear, sharp focus, so the emotions aroused in the audience will produce a specific mental reaction, a conclusive and determined belief.

And therein lies the secret of all immortal works. The story which strips away the placid surface of life and takes us with it into the inner hearts of people, the story which in every deft, forwarding touch, brings us closer to the brink of reality's stark truths; the story which thrusts us deeply into the emotions and minds of other people, is the story we live too fully to forget.

This spiritual up-welling is achieved through the subtle infusion of theme. Like the insidious hypnotism of drums throughout the night, the constant insistence of thematic rhythm must steadily rise, weaving vividly into every foot of film the fundamental truth upon which the plot is based. And it is effected solely by the thematic injection of life itself. The characters must be down-to-earth, flesh and blood people we know, folks we work with, loved ones we live with, people we understand and who do the things we would do under the same conditions, or people whose warped characters are made plain, so that their actions are plausible and even anticipated.

With this richly universal soil, intelligent handling of any solid theme will bear financial fruit.

## *Psychology of Audience-Attention*

HOLLYWOOD has squandered millions through its inability to grasp the principles of audience-interest. Ironically, they are simple; systematically applied, they are infallible. In essence, curiosity is the compelling force that has driven Man to every great advance. This same curiosity is the most universally powerful instrument of dramatic law. Any story which arouses immediate curiosity, which sustains that curiosity by feeding it and never until the end satisfying it, is a story that will make money.

Elements of entertainment are precise and determinable. The extent of their application to any film is an almost exact measure of its box-office potentialities. We use these



essential story-tools as the determining factors in judging the structure of every picture, because every successful film story is made with this kindergarden recipe. I quote Frederick Palmer:

"The story tells of people; characters. The portrayal of characters is . . . . CHARACTERIZATION

"The people or characters of a story have individual desires. Their desires cause them to do certain definite things, to perform definite actions. The cause of the expression of desire in action is called motive, and its use in story construction is referred to as . . . . MOTIVATION.

"Motive finds expression in deeds, which we generalize as . . . . ACTION

"Opposing motives, clashing in action result in . . . . CONFLICT

"The period of doubt during which the outcome of conflict is awaited creates . . . . SUSPENSE

"The combination or complication of interwoven circumstances is a . . . . PERDICAMENT OF SITUATION

"Which develops into a . . . . CRISIS

"Which culminates in a . . . . CLIMAX"

These are the vital organs of a story. Misuse of any one of them can destroy the forwarding movement, and with it, curiosity. For example, many otherwise fine film-yarns dissipate the reality-illusion, upon which curiosity is dependent, by inaccurate, incomplete, or illogical characterization. We have all seen them, and we have been amused or annoyed, but we are never satisfied with the story whose characters are untrue to life.

The next ingredient of the recipe is motivation. In it always lies a story's weakness or strength. Characters who are propelled by inconsequential, implausible or unnatural motives, immediately strike a false note whose tone and timbre vibrate destructively throughout the entire picture, crushing the fragile and priceless threads of mood, the story's life-breath.

Now glance again at the definition of action. We see its true proportion and use in the story-structure. It is the objective carrier of theme. It is the living delineation of conflicting motives, ultimate in audience-interest; is the forwarding vehicle and the basic sustenance of the reality-illusion. In short, action, in its simplest form as directed story movement, in its advanced form, conflict; or, in its highest form, suspense, is the vital spark of interest in any story, and the self-explanation of the action-story's perennial appeal. It is the core and the secret of curiosity. And in motion pictures it can be carried only by the camera.

\* \* \*  
Maurice Zamm, National Broadcast Music Master made this statement: "Every motion picture should have a continuous musical score; the emotional effect of music is all-powerful in the building of mood and the overt expression of tempo. It is to be hoped that some day producers will realize the financial value of music's emotional appeal" Mr. Zamm is recognized as preeminent in his work. His statements bear weight and significance. Ever hear SPECTATOR make the same statement?

\* \* \*  
Ghosts of the ancient past! Three over-decked Swiss extras parading down Western Avenue each extolling his greatest histrionic moment, each with a highly affected accent and vehement gestures.

## Some Late Previews

### Regarded Commercially

PAROLE, Universal release of Robert Presnell production. Features Henry Hunter, Ann Preston, Alan Dinehart, Alan Baxter, Grant Mitchell, Noah Berry, Jr.; directed by Louis Friedlander; screen play by Kubec Glasmon and Horace McCoy; story by Kubec Glasmon and Joel Sayre, from suggestion by Robert Dillion and Kay Morris; photographed by George Robinson; dialog director, Charles K. Freeman; art director, Albert S. D'Agostino; assistant director, Phil Karlstein. Supporting cast: Bernadene Hayes, Alan Hale, Berton Churchill, Charles Richman, John Miltern, Selmer Jackson, Cliff Jones, Frank Mills, Anthony Quinn, Wallis Clark, Edward Keane, Douglas Wood, Christian Rub, John Kennedy and Frank McGlynn. Running time, 67 minutes.

PROCEEDING on the assumption that the public would pay for information about the conduct of its affairs, Universal gives us a well made piece of propaganda for greater understanding of the conduct of parole boards. Of course we should know more about the parole system. We should know more about the theory and practice of government of city, county, state and nation; about the composition and function of each of our courts, about all the bodies which have to do with our public affairs. This Universal picture, therefore, is to be commended for its assumption of the role of public instructor.

But, talking about functions, what is the function of the screen? My conception of it is as something to patronize at night to recover from the stress of the day's affairs; something to entertain us to the point of forgetfulness that there are such things as parole boards, courts and congresses unless they come incidentally into a story which has dramatic, romantic or comedy values in itself, a story which makes us interested in the affairs of people as persons and not as cogs in a public machine. I do not want the screen to preach to me, and of all the texts it might select for a sermon, I can imagine none with less appeal to me personally than the parole system. I presume the parole boards know more about it than I do, and I am willing to let them wrestle with it. I have my own worries.

And in addition to the narrow range of its thematic appeal, *Parole* invites our interest in two people I never heard of before. Its cast is headed by Henry Hunter and Ann Preston, two young people without box-office rating and whose names will not help the picture achieve the end for which I presume it was made—to earn profits for its makers. There were available for the production a few score young players known to the screen public, and from them selections might have been made to give it more assurance of box-office prosperity. With a theme which, in any case, can not interest foreign customers for Universal product, and a cast headed by names unknown even at home, I can not regard *Parole* as a business venture with much prospect of paying dividends.

This purely commercial review was inspired by remarks made to me by a producer who accused me of stressing too much the art of the screen and ignoring its status as a business. Having analyzed *Parole* as a business proposition, let me proceed to estimate its values as entertainment.

Louis Friedlander has given it good direction. I do not recall having seen one of his pictures before, but this one job assures me his future is bright. Of course we are presented with the usual overdose of close-ups, but I do not blame him for that. All the performances are satisfactory and Universal has provided an imposing production.

The story deals with two young men who are paroled. One (Hunter) goes straight; the other (Alan Baxter) continues his evil ways. This at least leaves the parole theme where it started. The real crook is a higher-up, a man named Mallard (Allan Dinehart), who never was caught, hence was not paroled. He is the evil influence in Baxter's career. In a melodramatic finish, Baxter is killed. Mallard ducks. Finally he is caught and is sentenced to fifty years, which gives the parole board plenty of time to get around to him.

### *Unpleasant Story*

AND SUDDEN DEATH, Paramount release of A. M. Botsford production. Supervised by William T. Lackey; directed by Charles Barton; screen play by Joseph Moncure March; from the story by Theodore Reeves and Madeleine Ruthven; assistant director, Eddie Montague; photographed by Alfred Gilks. Cast: Randolph Scott, Frances Drake, Tom Brown, Billy Lee, Fuzzy Knight, Terry Walker, Porter Hall, Charles Quigley, Joseph Sawyer, Oscar Apfel, Maidel Turner, Charles Arnt, Jimmy Conlin, John Hyams, Herbert Evans, Don Rowan, Wilma Francis. Running time, 67 minutes.

IF YOU can derive entertainment from good acting and direction, combined with a satisfactory production, you may think *And Sudden Death* worthwhile; but if your main objective when visiting a picture house is to find a story that is entertaining, this Paramount picture probably will not give you the complete satisfaction you crave. You will agree that reckless driving should be curbed, that our streets and highways should be made safe for both pedestrians and motorists, but I do not think that you, always a careful driver and with only an academic interest in the law's efforts to suppress the careless ones, will pay money to have the doctrine of safety preached at you from the screen.

Paramount, of course, realizes this, so illustrates its sermon with a human drama, one which I am afraid you will find difficult to take. The theme of the story made its first appearance on the screen eight or ten years ago under the title *Manlaughter*. For its rebirth as a talkie it has been brought strictly up to date, so much so that little of the strength it had in its silent form has been retained in its new form. It is an unpleasant story. A car in which a nice girl (Frances Drake) is riding with her drunken brother (Tom Brown), collides with a bus full of children, one of whom is killed. The girl assumes the blame, says she was driving, is convicted of murder and goes to the penitentiary. The brother, who was driving the car, lets the girl thus sacrifice herself.

It is a purely manufactured sacrifice. We derive satisfaction from screen entertainment in the degree in which the sympathetic characters do things we can approve. We can not approve the girl's action in this instance. There is no reason for it, nothing to justify it. Its only justification could be the protection of someone worth the sacrifice the girl made. The boy is not worth it. That he

would permit it in itself puts him down as a wretched cur.

Paramount makes an honest attempt to provide entertainment you will like. It is a picture crammed with action and physical thrills to compensate in a measure for the unpleasant and unconvincing story. Randolph Scott does well in the leading role. All the performances, in fact, are satisfactory.

Charles Barton's direction is excellent. It was a tough assignment to make the story entertaining, and to Barton goes the credit for whatever values it possesses. He is one of the most prominent of the group of young directors now bidding for fame.

### *Undeveloped Opportunities*

HEARTS DIVIDED, Warners release of Cosmopolitan-First National production by Frank Borzage; stars Marion Davies; features Dick Powell, Charlie Ruggles, Claude Rains, Edward Everett Horton, Arthur Treacher; directed by Frank Borzage; screen play by Laird Doyle and Casey Robinson; from the play 'Glorious Betsy,' by Rida Johnson Young; assistant directors, Lew Borzage and Johnny Gates; photographed by George Folsey; art director, Robert Haas, gowns, Orry-Kelly; original music and lyrics by Harry Warren and Al Dubin; musical direction, Leo F. Forbstein; supporting cast: Henry Stephenson, Clara Blandick, John Larkin, Walter Kingsford, Etienne Girardot, Halliwell Hobbes, George Irving, Sam McDaniels, Beulah Bondi, Phillip Hurlic. Running time, 87 minutes.

AN EXCEEDINGLY tedious offering. I am one of those who, in spite of Hearst's vulgar exploitation of her, could be entertained by Marion Davies' amusing screen portrayals. When she plays herself, she can draw from an audience the feeling of friendship accorded her by those who come in personal contact with her. In *Hearts Divided* she has a role which demanded the finished acting of a Claudette Colbert, a Norma Shearer, a Luise Rainer; a role which she tries hard to translate into believable terms but does not make convincing. Her task was made more difficult by the presence in the cast of some of the screen's most accomplished players.

Marion shares with that brilliant actor, Claude Rains, a long scene possessing emotional possibilities which could have been developed into tear-producing strength, but which succeeds only in being a pathetic exhibition of a young woman striving hopelessly to master a situation beyond her ability to make impressive. It was unfair to pit her against such an accomplished actor.

The story itself, one of historical significance, could have been made interesting if it had not been distorted to keep the star the constant center of attention. It deals with the purchase of Louisiana from Napoleon, but little of the drama of the international transaction is developed. Laird Doyle and Casey Robinson, writers of the screen play, are able craftsmen whose records make it impossible to believe the story is presented as they wrote it.

Three clever comedians, Edward Everett Horton, Charlie Ruggles and Arthur Treacher, add to the pathos. What they do is funny enough, but it is not related even remotely to the theme of the story. Their comedy is a devastating interpolation which could not have originated in the brains of two such skilled screen dramatists.

Money obviously was lavished on the production. Pictorially it is beautiful and the cast is an imposing one, but

all of Frank Borzage's ability as a director does not succeed in making it entertaining. That, however, in no way will curb the enthusiasm of those who write about it for the Hearst papers. They will describe it as the greatest motion picture ever presented to the public. They will present Marion's glycerine tears as evidence of her deep emotion. The tears in the eyes of an actress, however, are not important, even if they are real. An audience measures the emotional depth of a screen scene by the tears in its own eyes, not by those in the eyes of players.

### *Not One of the Best*

**WOMEN ARE TROUBLE**, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Directed by, Errol Taggart; produced by, Lucien Hubbard and Michael Fessier; screen plan by, Michael Fessier; from the story by George Harmon Coxe; musical score by, Edward Ward; recording director, Douglas Shearer; Art Director, Frederic Hope; associates, Eddie Imazu, Edwin B. Willis; photographed by, Oliver T. Marsh, A. S. C.; film editor, Conrad Nervig; Assistant director, Dolph Zimmer. Cast: Stuart Erwin, Paul Kelly, Florence Rice, Margaret Irving, Cy Kendall, John Harrington, Harold Huber, Kitty McHugh, Raymond Hatton.

**W**ITH everything in it for the making of a stirring crook drama, this one succeeds in being only ordinary entertainment to hold up its half of a double bill. It strives to be both comedy and drama, interlacing the two until they become tangled and each weakens the other. A girl reporter scores an extraordinary newspaper beat by photographing a murderer a moment after he has killed his victim. The photo is the only—and, of course, the best possible—clue to the identity of the murderer. Instead of following it through and developing the drama in the situation by sustaining its mood, there is a complete let-down due to the interpolation of a lot of three-cornered squabbling by the girl, the boy, and the city editor. The whole progress of the film is dotted with similar instances.

The weakness of *Women are Trouble* is fundamental. It does not focus our attention on one element. It interests us in the photograph, and then tries to divert us with inept comedy. *The Thin Man*, an outstanding success, does the same thing, but does it so cleverly its cleverness becomes an excuse to justify itself. *Women are Trouble* is not done cleverly.

It is the first directorial effort of Errol Taggart and displays considerable promise. Most of the dialogue lacks conversational quality to give it the intimacy essential to the complete illusion of reality a picture must create to make it convincing. I read somewhere that Taggart brought the picture in three days short of shooting schedule. He would have been wiser if he had used all the time at his disposal to make it more impressive. However, his interpretation of the script as it was handed him is, on the whole, a creditable job and it is safe to predict a successful career for him.

Stuart Erwin heads a cast with no weak spots in it. Stu is one of our most capable actors. Unfortunately he generally is cast as a simpering half-wit. I can remember him in only two parts which gave full scope to his ability as a serious actor, and in both he was excellent. Florence Rice is a girl who is going places. It is the first time I have seen her. With experience she will develop into a box-office asset. Paul Kelly plays a city editor unlike any

in captivity nowadays, but the illogical nature of his characterization is not his fault. He is a fine actor and what he does, he does exceedingly well. Another who gives a good account of himself is Cy Kendall, his convincing performance entitling him to bigger parts in bigger pictures. Ray Hatton, always dependable, has little more than a bit, but he makes it outstanding.

### *Cinematic Irritation*

**SPENDTHRIFT**, a Paramount release of the Walter Wanger production featuring Henry Fonda, Pat Paterson, Mary Brian and George Barbier; directed by Raoul Walsh; screen play by Raoul Walsh and Bert Hanlon; photographed by Leon Shamroy; art director, Alexander Toluboff; edited by Robert Simpson. Supporting cast: Edward Brophy, Richard Carle, J. M. Kerrigan, Spencer Charters, June Brewster, Halliwell Hobbes, Jerry Mandy, Greta Meyer, Miki Morita, Robert Strange. Running time, 80 minutes.

**W**HEN WE FIRST see Henry Fonda he is in an elaborately furnished office listening to some imposing looking gentlemen telling him he has dissipated his twenty-million-dollar inheritance. Henry summarizes his situation by saying that while his great home is full of priceless paintings and valuable first editions, his pockets are not full of cash; exits nonchalantly. From there the picture proceeds to teach a valuable lesson to all young fellows who inherit twenty million dollars when they become of age. It will serve a useful purpose also in showing Hollywood how a picture should not be made. For those without the inheritance and with no desire to learn about pictures, I am afraid *Spendthrift* has nothing.

I would not say it is the worst motion picture every made—merely that it is the worst I ever saw bearing the trademark of a major producer. I imagine Walter Wanger, in that last-minute rush which always precedes a departure for Europe, had to pass the responsibility for *Spendthrift* on to others who done him wrong. The production is up to Walter's standard, the cast is a capable one, but all the rest is deplorable.

An instance: When Henry, nonchalance still intact, reaches his treasure-filled mansion, accumulating on his way the delectable Pat Patterson, daughter of his horse trainer—he has a racing stable—he finds his butler (Halliwell Hobbes) entirely surrounded by yelling bill collectors wildly waving wads of bills. One of the noisiest finally out-yells the rest and gets the floor. He states he is the president of a bank with resources of three hundred million dollars, that Henry owes the bank three hundred thousand plus, and that if it is not paid pronto, he will take the house. Henry pleads for time, says he will get a job and pay up. Sneers from his audience. Then the girl from the stables makes a speech. She says every cent will be paid after one of Henry's horses wins the handicap. The collectors take her word for it and beat it.

If you can accept the president of such a big bank making such an ass of himself, you may get something out of the picture.

Somewhere along about this time it is revealed that all the food in the great house, heavily stocked with servants, consists of two eggs, and no one suggests to Henry that he sell one of his art treasures and buy at least another egg. And from there the thing goes on, piling absurdity

upon absurdity with pathetic insistence. There is something fascinating about it.

It is a crime to put such a fine actor as young Fonda in a part so impossible. Pat Patterson is the only one in the cast who gets anywhere. Personally most attractive, she reveals ability entitling her to bigger parts than have been assigned to her. The other players can not cope with the implausible story and ineffectual direction. Mary Brian is wasted as a designing adventuress, and June Brewster, George Barbier and Edward Brophy succeed only in aggravating the irritation.

### *Short, But Compelling*

THE SONG OF A NATION, Warner Brothers. Directed by Frank McDonald; screen play by Forrest Barnes; photography by William Skall, A. S. C.; film editor, Frank Dewar; art director, Ted Smith; technicolor color director, Natalie Kalmus; musical settings by the Hall Johnson Choir. Cast: Donald Woods, Claire Dodd, Joseph Crehan, Addison Richards, Carlyle Moore, Jr., Virginia Brissac, Gordon Hart, Stuart Holmes, Ferdinand Schumann-Heink, Jack Goodrich, Lottie Williams, Billy McClain.

RARELY are we permitted to view a short subject which in its brief footage stirs our emotions to a higher pitch than ninety-nine of every hundred feature pictures manage to do in their greater length. *The Song of a Nation* is a cinematic gem, an artistic morsel that will adorn any evening's entertainment irrespective of what else composes the screen program. It is the story of Francis Scott Key's writing of "The Star Spangled Banner," and if its superb telling does not arouse your patriotic impulses into tumultuous reaction, you had better hunt up *The Man Without a Country* and spend the rest of your life with him.

But it is not all patriotism. There is a touch of romance in it, of love of husband and wife, a tender, beautiful romance that pays you dividends by bringing a lump to your throat and keeping it there.

Frank McDonald gives this little masterpiece inspired direction. It is evident that his heart was in his work, that both patriotic and romantic impulses governed his handling of scenes. He treats the story subjectively, lets it tell itself and makes no visible effort to stress his points; there are no raised voices, no waving of flags, no patriotic orations. His characters are ordinary human beings—as human, that is, as Technicolor will permit them to appear. When Claire Dodd, as Key's wife, sings a song for a group of people in her home, she keeps her eyes on the sheet of music on the piano, just as nervous amateurs do when singing for their friends.

Donald Woods, as Key, gives a splendid performance, as do Joseph Crehan and Addison Richards, the latter in a short bit that he makes outstanding. Carlyle Moore, Jr. is a boy who also has his illuminating moment.

Technicolor achieves scenes of great beauty, but it not yet has succeeded in giving human beings flesh tints which resemble those they have while they are still alive. But even those who prefer their screen entertainment without color, will find the story inherently appealing enough to offset the handicap of brilliant hues. And those who like it will find *The Song of a Nation* an unalloyed delight.

The picture was made by Bryan Foy's organization, Buster Collier, his chief lieutenant having considerable to

do with it. Forrest Barnes wrote an excellent screen play. The song Miss Dodd sings, "Not So Long Ago," is by Jack Scholl, lyricist, and Moe Jerome, composer. They were asked for an original which would sound old enough to fit the period of the story, and made quite a remarkable job of it.

This is the most space I ever devoted to a review of a short subject. My excuse is that it is the best short subject I ever saw.

### *Joe Versus Tractors*

EARTHWORM TRACTORS, Warners release of First National production; supervised by, Sam Bischoff; stars, Joe E. Brown; directed by Raymond Enright; assistant director, Lee Kaytz; screen play by Richard Macauley, Joe Traub and Hugh Cummings; from the stories by William Hazlet Upson; photographed by Arthur Todd; art direction, Esdras Hartley; musical direction, Leo F. Forbstein. Supporting cast: June Travis, Guy Kibbee, Dick Foran, Carol Hughes, Gene Lockhart, Olin Howland, Joseph Crehan, Sara Edwards, Charles Wilson, William Davidson, Irving Bacon, Stuart Holmes. Running time, 63 minutes.

JOE E. BROWN had to go some in his latest picture to keep a tractor from stealing it. When the mammoth animated bug begins to cavort on the screen, it makes no difference to the audience whether Joe or Shirley Temple is at the wheel. The bug is the thing. It is a hilarious picture and no one who sees it is going to feel he did not get a run for his money.

Joe is a screen institution. I understand he is one of the few individuals who have definite audiences. So many people will go to a Joe E. Brown picture anyway, regardless of story or supporting cast. It so happens that one thing or another has kept me from catching one of Joe's productions for almost two years, so in *Earthworm Tractors* he comes to me as something refreshing and thoroughly enjoyable. As I viewed it, I was glad of my ignorance of the ways of technical departments. When I see Joe and Guy Kibbee in a tractor on the edge of a cliff, momentarily in danger of being blown to pieces by dynamite, their danger, to me, is real, and I get a devil of a kick out of it. The Warner technical department certainly can take a bow for its extraordinary contributions to the picture.

But as I viewed it I wondered why its makers did not make a greater effort to extend its appeal beyond the limits of Joe's established audience. Most of Enright's direction is careless, particularly his direction of dialogue. Joe's is delivered in a loud tone, as if he were spitting it out to get rid of it, regardless of its meaning. In a telephone sequence comedy values are lost by the direction accorded it. Comedy, to achieve its real value, must have a reasonable basis. Joe sits so far from the telephone that we know his voice could not be heard at the other end, and I cannot see anything funny in that. It is just one of the many incidents in the picture which lack appeal because they lack cleverness.

The script is constructed loosely, apparently on the theory that as Joe is the whole thing anyway, any kind of story and direction would do. The original *Earthworm* stories in *Saturday Evening Post* were amusing because their absurdities were given a logical twist. At no sacrifice of their comedy values, the incidents presented in the picture could have been written and directed in a manner

which would have given it more general appeal. Logic in a screen creation will satisfy those who can appreciate it, and its inclusion in no way will offend those who do not attach any value to it.

And another thing: Aiming a picture at a definite audience—taking the audience into consideration—is bad business. All the brains in a producing unit should be centered upon making the picture as good as possible, and no allowances for the star's established box-office strength should influence the course of production. The more the ultimate market is ignored, the closer producers will come to pleasing it.

### Good Double Bill

**POPPY**, Paramount release of the William Le Baron production starring W. C. Fields. Directed by A. Edward Sutherland; screen play by Waldemar Young and Virginia Van Upp from the play by Dorothy Donnelly; Paul Jones, associate producer; photographed by William Mellon; music and lyrics by Ralph Rainger, Leo Robin, Sam Coslow and Frederick Hollander; Hans Drier and Bernard Herzbrun, art directors; Stuart Heisler, film editor. Supporting cast: Rochelle Hudson, Richard Cromwell, Catherine Doucet, Lynne Overman, Granville Bates, Maude Eburne, Bill Wolfe, Adrian Morris, Rosalind Keith, Ralph Remley. Running time, 75 minutes.

**B**ILL LE BARON, producer, and Bill Fields, star, make a winning combination. *Poppy* is just about as delightful a bit of screen entertainment as one could wish for. Nothing is overdone, an unusual quality rarely found in comedies. The production is mounted handsomely, direction is understanding and unobtrusive, the performances are excellent and the musical interpolations are tuneful and fit into the story.

The picture takes us back half a century, when speed demons sat in buggies and made horses go fast, when life was placid and people dressed more cumberously than they do now. We will believe things could happen then which we would not believe could happen now. Waldemar Young and Virginia Van Upp, writers of the screen play, obviously based their work on that premise. In a modern setting the story would be unbelievable, but we accept it heartily when presented as a slice of life in a period when things were simpler. The screen play is a delightful piece of screen writing which makes no effort to obscure the path of the narrative. The denouncement becomes obvious long before it is reached, which disturbs us not at all as what happens is what we want to happen.

No performance W. C. Fields previously contributed to the screen was more nicely shaded. As the optimistic old fakir he is irresistible. His comedy is delicious. But he is not the whole show. The story itself is a large part of it, its emotional possibilities being developed by Edward Sutherland's thoughtful direction. The comedy interludes glide smoothly into and out of the forward progress of the film without disturbing the picture's mood.

There is a delightful romance, delicate as befits the period, shared by Rochelle Hudson and Richard Cromwell, two clever and appealing young people. Rochelle is coming along rapidly, her every performance being a little better than the one preceding it. Cromwell is a youth who holds much promise. Catherine Doucet is excellent in a character role, and Lynne Overman scores heavily as a designing attorney. Maude Eburne contributes an out-

standing characterization of a widow with a heart.

All in all, *Poppy* is a picture you must see. It is the most ingratiating piece of entertainment Paramount has offered us for some moons. It indicates that Bill Le Baron is getting into his stride as production chief and presages a new day for the old organization. Paul Jones, associate producer, deserves a word of commendation.

### Jessie Is a Joy

**IT'S LOVE AGAIN**, a Gaumont-British production. Directed by Victor Saville; original story by Marion Dix and Lesser Samuels; screen play by Marrison Dix; additional dialogue, Austin Melford; film editor, Al Barnes; art direction, A. Junge; music and lyrics, Sam Coslow and Harry Woods; musical score, Louis Levy and Bretton Byrd; dances arranged by Buddy Bradley. Cast: Jessie Matthews, Robert Young, Sonnie Hale, Ernest Milton, Robb Wilton, Sara Allgood.

**J**ESSIE MATTHEWS, a strong cast, clever screen play, good music and an imposing production combine to make this musical picture quite a lot better than nine-tenths of the same sort Hollywood has made. Of course, the possession of Jessie gives Gaumont-British a big start over us, for on this side of the Atlantic we have no young woman who can do as many things as well as the English miss does. She is an expert and graceful dancer, particularly efficient in the use of her hands; she sings without effort in a pleasing, full voice; has real ability as an actress, an intriguing personality, and plenty of good looks. *It's Love Again* will make her a box-office favorite in this country.

Again we have Sonnie Hale, a comedian of rare ability, and our own Robert Young, whose performance is excellent. There is no weak spot in the cast.

Victor Saville's direction could not be improved upon except in one sequence staged in a London tube—underground railway in this country—in which Jessie and Young behave in a manner that is made ridiculous by the presence of crowds of people.

A feature of the expertly written screen play is its incorporation of both songs and dances as parts of the story. The music throughout is of high quality. All in all, *It's Love Again* is splendid entertainment, a picture you cannot afford to overlook.

### Little Sybil Steps Out

**CHANGING OF THE GUARD**, Warner Brothers. Supervisor, Bryan Foy; Director, Bobby Connolly; Screenplay, Sig Herzig; Photography, Duke Green. Cast: Sybil Jason, Halliwell Hobbes, Sidney Bracey.

**A**NOTHER production of which Warners have reason to be proud. It is two reels of pictorial beauty, thrilling music and Sybil Jason. Here we have color where it belongs, and just about enough of it for one evening's entertainment in a picture house. *Changing of the Guard* is not a screen drama which depends for its entertainment values on the closeness with which it holds our attention on the story and keeps it from wandering to non-essential details. When we fear the hero is about to be stabbed in the back we do not wish our attention to be drawn to the color of his tie. In this Warner subject the color is a definite part of the whole. In undertaking

to show us what the Seaforth Highlanders look like, it has to show us the colors of its tartan and uniforms. It really is an abbreviated military pageant, and color always is an important part of a pageant.

A particularly important part of this one is Sybil Jason. This child has lovable qualities out of all proportion to her size. I warm to Shirley Temple as an accomplished actress, but still more so to Sybil as a person. In this short subject she does a tap dance which suggests the thought that Jack Warner may have the idea that in developing her as a screen attraction she should be taught to imitate the accomplishments which have made Shirley such an attraction. I hope Jack has no such idea. Sybil should be encouraged to express herself if she is to attain her potential box-office strength. By wise handling she can become a great favorite.

*Changing of the Guard* is high class entertainment reflecting credit on Bryan Foy, its producer, and all others who had a part in its making. The thrill of the swirl of bagpipes runs through it, the color is excellent and the acting of high quality. Both Halliwell Hobbes and Sidney Bracey give good performances. It is a production that will dignify any program. I hope Warners will make more like it and *Song of a Nation*, which I review elsewhere in this SPECTATOR.

### Completely Praiseworthy

THE CRIME OF DR. FORBES, 20th Century-Fox. Executive producer, Sol M. Wurtzel; directed by George Marshall; original screen play, Frances Hyland and Saul Elkins; music and lyrics, THE DOCTOR SONG, by Gene Rose and Sidney Clare; photography, Ernest Palmer, ASC; art direction, Duncan Cramer; assistant director, Sidney Bowen; film editor, Alex Troffey; costumes, William Lambert; sound, Alfred Bruzlin and Harry Leonard; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Gloria Stuart, Robert Kent, Henry Armetta, J. Edward Bromberg, Sara Haden, Alan Dinehart, Charles Lane, DeWitt Jennings, Taylor Holmes, Paul Stanton, Russell Simpson, Paul McVey, Charles Crocker-King.

Reviewed by ALLAN HERSHOLT

HERE THE SPECTATOR is treated to distinctly realistic, strong, at times uncommonly powerful drama. In every respect does this offering merit attention and praise. Dealing principally with a "mercy killing," its narrative is unique, neatly contrived and unusually striking, and has been transferred onto celluloid with commanding intelligence and sincerity, given pace and rhythm that only those expert in cinematic technique could impart. A beautiful mounted production, in places thrilling in its drama, often charmingly amusing, appealingly human and always absorbing, it rightfully achieved high favor with its recent preview audience. And that it will succeed both as entertainment and commercially wherever publicly screened, is my firm belief.

Responsibility for much of the film's success goes to George Marshall, whose utterly flawless direction impressed me as being considerably superior to anything he has offered during his years as a motion picture director. It is a splendid job.

Also deserving of a major share of praise are Frances Hyland and Saul Elkins, authors of the original screen play, a brilliantly wrought piece of writing.

Principal acting honors are divided between Gloria Stuart, J. Edward Bromberg, Henry Armetta, Robert

Kent, Sara Haden and Alan Dinehart, each contributing an excellent portrayal. Bromberg, recently brought to Hollywood from a successful career before Broadway footlights, is expected to experience a lengthy and bright period in pictures. The same, I believe, will come to young Kent, another newcomer. Outstanding in supporting roles are DeWitt Jennings, Taylor Holmes, Charles Lane, Paul Stanton, Russell Simpson, Charles Crocker-King and Paul McVey. Ernest Palmer receives credit for the fine camera work.

*Dr. Forbes* is another addition to the great quantity of outstanding productions given us by Sol M. Wurtzel, executive producer for Twentieth Century-Fox. Don't fail to view the picture.

## New York Spectacle

By FRED STEIN

ONE NIGHT LAST WEEK we found ourselves in a small New England town. Having dined well on the local lobsters and clams, we strode forth from the hotel to see what movies we might see. The choice was limited, and it shortly became evident that if we were to see a film at all, it would have to be one of which we knew nothing in advance. Since we are not movie-minded to the point of being able to enjoy the sort of mediocre program picture often shown in small towns, we hesitated considerably before trying this one. A very engrossing book (*The Way of a Transgressor*) was calling to us to come away. The advertised actors were good, but they had been in bad pictures as well as better ones. The title of the film indicated nothing. In short, we were about to turn away when we were seized with one of those unaccountable impulses which cause gamblers to declare that they were prompted by God or by the Devil, and we entered precipitately.

For the first ten minutes we were sure it had been the Devil's urging. The picture began to tell the story of a poor but honest young man who was engaged to marry a brave young girl. Fate made it necessary for her to go to a distant city, and the young man fell sadly but grimly to work, saving his pennies against the day when he would go West to meet her and they would be married. And here, we thought, the plot thins. Against his better nature the hero would fall in with the boys down at the pool-room or with a fancy lady. Although rather innocent, he would become the victim of a frightful frame-up or some mighty misunderstandings. Lies would reach his far-off love, who would turn her face to the wall and endeavor to forget. Perhaps she would accept the offer of some repugnant suitor or of a kind-hearted but elderly gentleman. Then, at the most cruel pass, she would learn all and come to his aid. The powers of darkness would be defeated and he, contrite, repentant, would take her into his arms. All would be forgiven, forgotten, and for Heaven's sake let's get back to Negley Farson.

But no. Hesitantly we begin to realize that this may be one of the great pictures. Out of the calm, banal beginning, out of the lives of these most ordinary people, there arise slowly, unbelievably, the form and future of a ter-

rible drama. As the film progresses we forget the book, the theatre and the New England town, and know that we are witnessing a picture which not only is first-rate cinema, but which also presents an urgent social theme. Mob violence is the theme, and the name of the picture, of course, is *Fury*.

We do not intend this to be a formal review and will therefore not attempt a comprehensive criticism. Rather we would mention a few of the things in this excellent picture which stand out, as does Everest among the Himalayas. One of them is that most awful sequence in which we watch the beginnings, growth and horrible spread of the vicious contagion, from the first carefully careless words of a hen-gossip, through the jostling, amiable struttings of a few hesitant leaders, to the final wild frenzy of the self-righteous mob. No scholarly treatise on the psychology of crowds could present a more penetrating study than do these swift scenes.

Another high point in the picture is the expert handling and development of character. We need not go to the protagonists for an example of this, for it is to be observed even in the lesser parts. The sheriff, for instance, is first seen as a man who knows the law of the land and will see that justice is done. To him his prisoner is innocent until he is proven guilty, and it will indeed be over the dead bodies of himself and his deputies that a mob will take the law into its own hands. But later, when we see him in the courtroom, we are shocked and pained to find that he refuses to identify the ringleaders. Not at once do we realize that it is true to life for the sheriff, who in the full active flush of defending the law was an honest man, to succumb later to the persistent pressure of his lifelong friends who may now, but for him, be hanged, and to perjure himself in their favor on the stand. Such treatment and development of character proves that not for nothing have the best writers been brought to Hollywood.

As for the acting, Spencer Tracy must have been the perfect answer to the prayer of a production staff harassed with a great but delicate idea. Walter Abel, who gave a beautiful performance here in *Merrily We Roll Along* several years back, has hitherto been hampered in Hollywood by being miscast and also, perhaps, by lack of experience in the new medium. In this picture he at last has been given a part which is more in line with his abilities, and as a result he has stolen quite a few minutes of the show. Sylvia Sydney looks straight ahead with telling effectiveness. She can contribute a great deal more to a picture than a blank stare, and it is a pity that she was not given the opportunity.

But this is by the way, as is also the fact that the ending of the picture is extremely factitious. In the breadth of the conception, the artistry of its execution and in the importance of its theme, *Fury* should stand out as one of the great pictures of the year. When it had ended and we found ourselves again in a small New England town, we knew that a dozen disappointments in as many highly publicized films can be completely redeemed by the delight of walking into a little provincial movie-house and seeing, all-unheralded, an event.

\* \* \*

The season on Broadway is now drawing to a close.

From every point of view it has been successful, and those who of recent years have been stating that the legitimate theatre is moribund are rapidly recanting. As we look back at the many successes of the year we note particularly that the majority of them have been plays which had some definite social theme. Perhaps it would be worth while to mention some of these and, for the benefit of those who have not seen them, to suggest the underlying theme of each.

*Idiot's Delight* and *Bury the Dead* were concerned with the imbecility of war. *Dead End* presented the problem of the slums. *Winterset*, based on the Sacco-Vanzetti case, dealt with justice as it is done to the weak by the strong, and with its tragic aftermath in the lives of those even remotely concerned. *Ethan Frome* attacks the middle-class moral code which weighs down the characters until they are stooped with tragedy. *Paradise Lost* tells of the decline of the middle class under capitalism. *Mulatto* presents again the problem of the races. Of last year's successes still running, *Children's Hour* is an indictment of the evils produced by self-conscious social standards, and *Tobacco Road* assails the conditions which make possible the lives of its "lost, outpaced people." An English importation, *Love on the Dole*, has essentially the same theme as *Paradise Lost*.

The success of these plays demonstrates that it is still the high function of the serious theatre to portray man in his struggle against the mighty social forces which weigh him down.

\* \* \*

We had a talk recently with Dr. Ossip Bernstein, a prominent international lawyer and champion chess player. He had had a highly successful law practice in Russia before the Revolution. He told us that before a student of those days could be admitted to law school he had to pass an examination which endeavored to reveal not his knowledge, but his intelligence. This was before the vogue of mental measurement had arrived, and some of the questions asked required a great deal more deductive thought than do those which are asked in this country today in the determination of that dubious quantity, the I. Q. Herewith we present one of them:

Consider that you are seated in a garden. A friend announces in a loud voice that he is a mathematical genius and can tell at a glance exactly how many leaves there are on any given tree. As an example of this extraordinary faculty he selects a few trees at random, and states categorically the number of leaves on each. You laugh at him, but he defies you to give absolute proof, without counting the leaves, that he cannot do it. How would you prove it? . . . Our Russian friend told us that he asked this of Albert Einstein, who answered it casually and at once. We will give you a liberal amount of time in which to find the answer. To be exact, we will give you until the appearance of the next issue of the SPECTATOR.

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# S P E C T A T O R

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Vol. 11

JULY 4, 1936

No. 7

## Warners Lead Producers During First Half-Year

## If Jerome Kern Knew About Motion Pictures

## Review of Reviews for the Past Six Months

## Industry Fooling Itself About Use of Color

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# Picking Winners for First Six Months

**D**URING THE FIRST six months of the present calendar year I have reviewed for the SPECTATOR one hundred and thirteen pictures made by major producers. In a radio interview last week I was asked to tell listeners-in which of the pictures I had seen this year I thought the best. My reply was that there was no such thing as the best picture of any extended period, the Academy to the contrary notwithstanding. If I were asked to name the best example of the art of the screen I had viewed in the past six months, my reply would be *Song of China*, the only true motion picture I have seen in the last five years. The one with the greatest pictorial sweep, the most lavish production, the most arresting entertainment, is *The Great Ziegfeld*. But on what basis can the majestic *Ziegfeld* be compared with the dainty *Song of China*?

How can we compare either with the intensely human, emotion compelling *White Angel* which brings back to this generation a great woman in the person of Florence Nightingale? And would we say that *White Angel* is a better picture than the swashbuckling, dynamic and dramatic *Captain Blood*? And where on our list would we place *Anthony Adverse*, the finest example we have had yet of the transference of a novel to the screen? Or *Petrified Forest*, the finest example of the transference of a dramatic play to the screen? Or *Show Boat*, that outstanding job of putting a musical play on the screen?

No, there is no such thing as the best picture, although at the end of the year the Academy will say there is and will award a trophy to one it selects. The best I can do as I look over this year's SPECTATORS to refresh my memory, is to estimate the merits of the pictures I reviewed according to the degree in which each attained its own objective. *Ziegfeld* started out to become the most spectacularly beautiful production thus far to reach the screen. It attained its objective, therefore is the greatest of its kind, not only this year to date, but during the entire history of screen entertainment. *The Ghost Goes West* is a satirical comedy and for being what it intended to be, deserves as much praise as the great Metro production. With the basis of comparison understood, let us glance at what we have been offered during the first half of 1936.

Each of the pictures I have mentioned thus far is my selection to head its own class. For story conception and realization of possibilities I would place *The Green Pastures* in the first class, as well as *Under Two Flags*, and *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. For the magnitude of its setting, the beauty of its music and the quality of its singing, I would place *Rose Marie* close to *Show Boat* as the best examples among the musical offerings. This completes the list of what we will call our four-star pictures. Now let us look at the product of each studio and determine how many three-stars we can distribute in addition to the headliners, the selections necessarily being confined to the pictures I have seen. I may have missed some. The order in which the pictures are listed is the order in which their reviews appeared in the SPECTATOR.

## Warner Brothers-First National

Twenty pictures reviewed. Four Stars: *Petrified Forest, Captain Blood, Anthony Adverse, The Green Pastures, White Angel.*

Three Stars: *I Married a Doctor, Ceiling Zero, Singing Kid.*

## Paramount

Nineteen pictures reviewed. No four-stars.

Three Stars: *Anything Goes, Milky Way, Desire, Fatal Lady, The Moon's Our Home, Till We Meet Again, Forgotten Faces.*

## Twentieth Century-Fox

Seventeen reviewed. Four Stars: *Under Two Flags.*

Three Stars: *Prisoner of Shark Island, Message to Garcia, The Country Doctor, Captain January.*

## Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

Seventeen reviewed. Four Stars: *The Great Ziegfeld.*

Three Stars: *Rose Marie, Trouble for Two, Wife Versus Secretary, Voice of Bugle Ann, Small Town Girl.*

## United Artists

Seven reviewed. Four Stars: *The Ghost Goes West.*

Three Stars: *Modern Times, Little Lord Fauntleroy, These Three, One Rainy Afternoon.*

## R.K.O.-Radio

Seven reviewed: No four-stars.

Three Stars: *The Lady Consents, Follow the Fleet, The Ex-Mrs. Bradford.*

## Universal

Six reviewed. Four Stars: *Show Boat.*

Three Stars: *Next Time We Love.*

## Columbia

Three reviewed. Four Stars: *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town.*

I do not follow box-office figures closely enough to be aware how the pictures I mention fared with the public. I list them merely according to my own conception of the degree in which they realize their opportunities. I have given four stars to those which I consider the most important among those I have reviewed in the past six months. There are ten of them, five being Warner Brothers productions. Jack Warner has proven himself the most daring producer and Hal Wallis the outstanding head of a production department. It is an extraordinary record for one studio. Four of the five, forty per cent of the most important pictures turned out by the entire industry during the first half of the year, were supervised by Henry Blanke, which rates him as Hollywood's foremost associate producer. The only director with both a four-star and a three-star picture to his credit is William Keighley; the only one with two three-stars is Stephen Roberts.

To bring to your attention again the names of those identified with the pictures which the SPECTATOR deems the best it has reviewed this year. Complete lists follow:

PETRIFIED FOREST, Warners release of Henry Blanke production. Stars, Lesslie Howard and Bette Davis. Directed by Archie L. Mayo; screen play by Charles Kenyon and Del-

(Continued on page 21)

SCREEN PLAYS

MARY OF SCOTLAND  
(Awaiting Release)

THE PLOUGH & THE STARS  
(Shooting)

JUBILEE JIM (Preparing)\*

DUDLEY NICHOLS—RKO

\*An Original, with Tom Lennon.

◆  
  
HOWARD  
EMMETT  
ROGERS

WRITER

UNDER CONTRACT TO M. G. M.  
  
◆

WALDEMAR  
  
YOUNG

UNDER CONTRACT TO

PARAMOUNT

MORDAUNT SHAIRP

*Writer of*

WHITE ANGEL SCREEN PLAY

*"One of the finest bits of screen writing we have had, Mordaunt Shairp's screen play being brilliant recognition of the camera's right to play a large part in film creations, of dialogue's position as a supplementary element in a basically pictorial art."—Welford Beaton in the Hollywood Spectator.*



From the

# Editor's Easy Chair



**J**EROME KERN, who has deserted Broadway and hereafter will put his genius as a composer at the service of motion picture producers, states in an interview in *Los Angeles Times* that a thorough knowledge of the theatre is an essential to the equipment of a present day music master. He knows the theatre, he says, from the railing around the orchestra pit to the last piece of rope on the highest piece of scenery. The inference is that he believes such knowledge will be of help to him in composing music for the screen. He boasts no knowledge of the screen nor does he intimate that he considers it desirable. He has brought Broadway with him to Hollywood, apparently in the belief the film capital will absorb it without any making over to accommodate screen conditions. In his interview Kern reveals the typical Broadway mind which feels that Hollywood should thank God for Broadway and refuses to entertain for a moment the thought that Broadway should thank God for Hollywood. There is a place in pictures for such a distinguished composer as Jerome Kern, but his value to them will not be realized until he gets over the notion that his familiarity with the theatre can be applied to his service to the screen. His melodies can be of value to musical pictures constructed upon much the same lines as musical stage offerings, but that by no means sets a limit upon the contributions composers will make to screen creations when Hollywood learns how they should be made.

\* \*

**MR. KERN** no doubt would be surprised to learn that if he ever makes his greatest possible contribution to screen music, his reward will consist only of what he is paid for his labor. It will not add to his fame, for no one will hear it. If he would study the screen as he has the stage, he would discover the fact of their lack of relationship and he would realize that the great screen composer of the future will be one who provides a continuous score so in keeping with the mood of the picture, so completely in sympathy with each of its scenes, that no attention would be paid it by the audience. It is hopeless to expect perfect screen music, but it is interesting as a subject of discussion. We will eliminate from our discussion the music composed for musical pictures, for the song and dance numbers which will constitute so much of their footage, the music for which will be composed by the Jerome Kerns. The great bulk of the music, the really important part of it, will be the scores for non-musical productions, and the musicians of greatest value to Hollywood will be those who compose such scores. The successful composers will be those who never knew there is a stage or have forgotten all they ever knew about it,

and who will do all their thinking in terms of the screen. The first thing they will learn is that their music must never step to the front and attract any attention to itself. They will not reconcile themselves to this discovery until they go still farther back and find out why such musical treatment must be given a screen offering. Let us lead them back.

\* \*

**AS THE CAMERA** is the screen's only legitimate story-telling medium, it follows that the perfect motion picture must be that which tells its story entirely in pictures. But even in the silent days, perfection was not necessary. To make less arduous the production of a picture, titles were displayed on the screen to expedite the telling of the story. But what concerns us chiefly in our discussion of music is the fact that the pictures were silent, both action and dialogue being recorded by the camera. Even so, there was no silent motion picture entertainment. From tinnany pianos in the dumps, to symphony orchestras in the palaces, there was music of some sort to accompany a film. Why? Why do we have cabbage with corn beef? Beans with pork? In the two latter instances, it is because of the demands of chemistry that there be in one an element to counteract an element in the other. For the same sort of reason we had music with our silent motion picture. When one faculty is exercised to the exclusion of all others, it tires more readily than if another faculty be exercised in sympathy with it. To follow a story told in pictures on the screen it was necessary for us to have our visual sense constantly on the alert. The picture, presenting no dialogue for our intellects to interpret, was purely emotional entertainment. Therefore, if we wished to relieve the strain on our visual sense, it was necessary to find something whose appeal also was purely emotional. Music was the only thing which answered all requirements, the only thing which could reduce the pressure on the visual sense by employing the aural sense in sympathy with it.

\* \*

**JUST AS READILY** as it accepted cabbage with its corn beef, the film audience accepted music with its silent pictures. It did not know the reason for the cabbage, nor was it aware of the reason for the music. As a matter of fact, it did not hear the music, was not conscious of it, because all it could think about was what its eyes were beholding on the screen; but even though unnoticed, music was the element which made film entertainment complete. Exhibitors did not know why music was essential. It was not necessary that they should. Hollywood did not know. It was as ignorant of the reason for music

with silent pictures as it is ignorant to-day of the nature of the business it thinks it is in. If it were not, every foot of talkie film going out from Hollywood would bear its share of a continuous score. In addition to the physiological reason for music, as set down above, there is a psychological reason almost as powerful. The preservation of the mood of a picture is essential to its artistic integrity and the achievement of its maximum entertainment quality. Music is the perfect background to keep the mood from straying. And there is still another reason which never has occurred to the makers of our pictures. Producers and exhibitors are worrying about the increasing costs of feature pictures and decreasing box-office receipts. The producers are unaware that by using music intelligently they can make their pictures cost less and earn more. It will take another paragraph to explain that.

\* \*

EVEN THE MOST stupid producer realizes there is too much dialogue in the pictures he is turning out. None of them apparently knows how to reduce the quantity. Scenes with no dialogue seem to drag, to cause a let-down in the forward movement of the story. To remedy this, to give life to the silent interludes, music often is resorted to, but splashes of it here and there throughout a picture do not achieve altogether satisfactory results, consequently the effort to reduce the amount of dialogue is only half-hearted and shows no progress in the right direction. But suppose a producer decided today that each of his pictures was to be given a complete score, irrespective of its dialogue content, that music would be used as a background for both dialogue and silent scenes. As silence thereafter would not be a disturbing factor, the producer would encourage his writers to provide more of it, and the much desired reduction in the excessive amount of dialogue would be under way insofar as the producer's product was concerned, for it would not take him long to discover that non-essential speeches need not be recorded. This would expedite shooting, thereby reducing costs. The next step would be the discovery that mechanical sounds could be interpreted by his orchestra in tones which would be more pleasant for the audience to listen to. Thus such sound need not be recorded while the scenes were being shot, further shortening the shooting schedule and reducing costs. The score, of course would cost money, but the improvement in the quality of the entertainment would bring to the box-office still more money, thereby making the investment a profitable one. As the only reason for the film industry's existence is to earn profits, the production program here suggested appears to be one it would be wise for it to adopt.

\* \* \*

MAJOR PRODUCERS announce eighteen all-color features as part of their new season's output. Because *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* was a title with established box-office value, Walter Wanger paid a large sum for it. He shot it in Technicolor. Because it has proven a satisfactory box-office, success, Hollywood attributes its drawing power to the fact of its being shot in color, and not to the title which Walter bought on the theory that it had box-office value. The success of the picture prompted producers to make eighteen color commitments. The second color production to display Technicolor's latest advances, *The Dancing Pirate*, has not been released long

enough yet to demonstrate its box-office strength. It contains some of the most beautiful color photography ever shown on the screen, and if color has drawing power, this picture will demonstrate it. *Lonesome Pine* came as a novelty after a long lapse in color presentations, and its success was to be expected. *Dancing Pirate* is the real test. Reasoning from the standpoint of the fundamentals of the screen as an entertainment medium, one may with assurance predict failure for *Pirate*, that its draw will not be big enough to justify the expenditure of the \$150,000 which it cost in excess of what it would have cost to shoot it in black and white. Color is without box-office value. Hollywood should know this without waiting for the box-office to demonstrate it. Children studying motion pictures in high-schools know it, and they know the reason for it.

\* \*

COLOR HISTORY is going to repeat itself. Enthusiasm for it existed six of seven years ago, at which time the SPECTATOR predicted for it what eventually happened. Producers announced a flock of color pictures; a few were made, the rest cancelled because of the public's indifference to color on the screen. We make another prediction: Producers are not going to make eighteen color pictures during the present season. They will not make nine. Before they make that number, they will be so fed up with monkeying with something the public will not buy, they will squirm out of their further commitments and get back into their real business. When color failed before, the excuse was made for it that realism in color reproduction had not been attained. Technicolor lay dormant for the intervening years and then came out with the glad news that at last it had natural color to sell. And the film industry rose to the bait. It really is funny, when you think it over. If the color we see on the screen is attractive, what difference does it make whether or not it is natural? Before we can admire the color of a woman's gown photographed in Technicolor, must we have assurance from Technicolor that the shade we see on the screen is the exact shade of the gown itself? When the children now studying the screen grow up and control production, they will not spend huge sums of money to add to their pictures something that will not add to their box-office value. Why color, anyway? The SPECTATOR's pages are open to Technicolor, to anyone, to answer that question.

\* \*

LET US CLOSE our discussion of color with some opinions expressed in *Film Daily* by Don Carl Gillette, one of the most level-headed fellows writing about pictures in New York. In a recent issue of *Film Daily* he said: "Efforts to take color out of the trenches and send it over the top, as far as feature pictures are concerned, are being stymied by a peculiar circumstance. It has already been proven quite conclusively that color, by itself, is close to nil in entertainment value. The only way it can amplify the values of a picture is by being utilized with judicious taste in a supplemental capacity. Unless the color is unobtrusive, it is apt to clash with and distract attention from the story, thus throwing the audience in a state of more or less confusion and sending the folks home more perplexed than entertained. In other words, if the color sticks out prominently, the story has got to be two or three times as good as usual in order to make a

showing for itself. A weak story will be sharply exposed, rather than aided, by color. Because of these curious reasons, the box-office value of color in features likewise is a pretty slim quantity. For the more you try to sell color as a value, the more you burden yourself with the handicap of having to give audiences added entertainment values which the color cannot deliver unless it is contained in the story. It has also been found through extensive inquiry that movie fans are decidedly more critical of a color feature than of the ordinary black and white. So, although color is a definite asset in scenics and cartoons, it looks as though the much heralded 'all-color era,' often predicted as due within the next five years, is far from a probability." I had completed my contribution to this discussion while the *Film Daily* containing Gillette's was in the mails on its way from New York. Each of us, therefore, arrived at his conclusions without being influenced by the thoughts of the other.

\* \* \*

I LOSE. I SAID that if any sound picture ran eight weeks at the Carthay Theatre, I would climb its tower and bite a hole in its top. *The Great Ziegfeld* is running a dozen weeks or more. I am not quite sure I can make good. My teeth are all right, but I am not much of a climber. The strange thing about my boast is that when I made it I overlooked all the cinematic yammerings I have been indulging in ever since the sound device made its advent. The screen is a pictorial art, I always have contended, and derives its strength from the degree in which it presents purely visual entertainment. *The Great Ziegfeld* owes its success to its visual beauty, to the fact of its being the most arresting spectacle ever shown on the screen. Its story is incidental. I still maintain that the best all-talkie could not run at the Carthay as long as indifferent silent pictures used to run there. The long run of *Ziegfeld* is due to its possession in such a large measure of the quality which made silent pictures enjoy long runs—visual instead of aural entertainment. But I forgot that when I made my reckless boast, forgot the very thing I have been harping on for years. I should read my own writings more carefully. However, I am willing to hazard another guess. *Anthony Adverse* follows *Ziegfeld* into the Carthay for an extended run at the same admission prices. *Adverse* is not visual entertainment. It is a talkie, as excellent a talkie as *Ziegfeld* is a spectacle.

\* \* \*

ONE ADVANTAGE *Adverse* has over *Ziegfeld* is that tens of thousands of people within the Carthay's range of drawing power know Anthony intimately, knew him before he was born and what happened to him after the picture ends, whereas the *Ziegfeld* name means little to those who paid to see his life depicted on the screen. The drawing power of the picture is due solely to the grandeur of its spectacle. The story itself, if presented without the spectacle, would have made the picture just an ordinary run-of-the-mill production, notable chiefly for the fine performance of Luise Rainer and the interesting characterization of Bill Powell. With the spectacle, it is the finest visual treat ever presented on the screen. *Adverse* is one of the finest talkies ever presented. If, when given the sound device, producers were wise in substituting aural for visual entertainment, if the ears of the audience will respond as readily to what is given them to hear as the

## Lest You Forget

As you look over this quarterly SPECTATOR the thought may occur to you that you would like your name to be among those which will appear in the next Quarterly Number to be published in October.

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eyes have responded to what have been given them to see since the birth of screen entertainment, then the run of *Adverse* at the Carthay will be as long as that of *Ziegfeld*. Showing the two pictures side by side, so to speak, puts the talkie squarely on trial. The SPECTATOR always has contended that aural entertainment does not possess the box-office strength of visual entertainment, that the screen is a visual art, that producers blundered in going over wholly to the microphone as their story-telling medium. We will let the two runs at the Carthay settle the argument. The other guess I am willing to hazard it that *Adverse*, the altogether excellent talkie, will not run much over half as long as *Ziegfeld* ran.

### *Money and Emotions*

AS WE LOOK back over the pictures of the first six months of this year, the only conclusion we can arrive at is that the film industry is following a course which leads to danger. Its disposition is to appeal to its patrons with more size than quality. It is overlooking the box-office value of simple appeal to human emotions. My personal longing is to see a picture with a field of clover in it, a cow and an old dog, a story of plain people who live as I would like to live myself, far from the clatter of city streets, away from contact with those who defy the law, beyond the sound of spitting guns and shrieking sirens, and outside the range of talcum powder's odor and domestic brawls.

It costs less money to appeal to the heart than it does

Frances Dee

to appeal to the eye. The screen's present tendency is to fill the eye and leave the heart empty, to make pictures with hammers and saws instead of with human emotions, to excite the audience rather than to bring tears to its eyes. Its greatest strength is its emotional appeal. Excitement is an emotion, but not such a pleasant and long-remembered one as sympathy or friendly understanding.

Hollywood is out-building itself, setting a pace in money spending that ultimately must pass the point of assured profit. The public will tire of the things money can put on the screen, but it never will tire of the simple things which stir its emotions as much for their simplicity as for their significance as story elements. Hollywood is teaching it to look for grandeur on the screen, to be satisfied only with million-dollar productions. More money is the only thing which can sustain a money spending pace. The audience satisfied today with a million-dollar picture, will demand a two-million one tomorrow. It will tire of mere money on the screen, but it never will tire of a boy and girl walking hand-in-hand along a country lane.

The more Hollywood producers try to out-build one another, the farther will they get away from their audience.

### *The Story Shortage*

THE OTHER DAY I was in the private office of one of the leading artists' managers when the scenario editor of a major studio called him up. From the end of the conversation I heard I gathered that the studio was in a devil of a fix for stories for two of its stars. My manager friend (A) said his office had read about two hundred recent books without finding one he could recommend.

B apparently asked A about plays. They wept gently over the dearth of play material. Just as bad as the book situation, A stated lugubriously.

They talked and talked. A said his representative was seeing every play presented in New York and that he had London and the Continent covered so closely that no choice play material originating over there could slip through his fingers. He expected galley proofs of two promising books to arrive next week and he would hurry them to B's office. They shed a few more tears and rang off.

And while the lamentations were in progress I thought of the tremendous stature of the motion picture industry, the billions of dollars, francs, pounds, liras, marks, yens, rupees and pesos invested in it, and its stupendous yearly income.

Amazing things the industry has done, I reflected, but more amazing is something it has left undone—the encouragement of the development of a literature of its own. Neither A nor B even mentioned the possibility of finding an original story for either of B's two stars. Only playwrights and novelists were discussed, not screen writers. I asked A why. He was surprised.

"Name me half a dozen outstanding originals you have seen on the screen in the past year," he challenged. "Where are we going to get originals? Who's writing them?"

I argued that any writer with brains would be a fool to write directly for the screen when by writing in another



medium he would get several times as much money from the screen for every story or play adaptable for motion picture presentation. Playwrights and novelists are trained to express themselves in mediums alien to that of the screen and are not encouraged to think in picture terms. It is natural that they should select themes that lend themselves principally to expression in the medium in which they first appear.

There is an acute shortage of good screen material and motion picture producers blame playwrights and novelists for it! The truth is that the producers themselves are to blame. The sole responsibility for the famine belongs to them. And the famine will continue until producers awake from their stupid dream that their industry can sustain itself by chewing the cud of alien arts.

The novelist expresses himself in the written word that is to be read, the playwright in the written word that is to be spoken. The screen expresses itself in pictures, in stories that the camera is to translate for their ultimate consumers. The methods of writing must be as far apart as the means of expression. The thoroughly trained screen writer—the writer so steeped in the fundamentals of screen art that he conforms to them automatically and subconsciously when writing screen material—would be no more capable of writing a novel than the novelist now is proving himself capable of writing a motion picture.

If Hollywood a few years ago had announced that beginning in 1936 it would cease buying books and plays and would buy only stories conceived and created solely for the screen, and at the same time had formulated a plan by which writers could learn what a motion picture is, to-day there would be no shortage in story material and no woe at the box-office. There would be hundreds of writers familiar with screen fundamentals turning out bushels of material that studios could paw over in search of the most delectable morsels.

And then New York play producers would have their scouts out here trying to get a line on the stories that were to be produced and which perhaps might lend themselves to rewriting into plays. It would be no more ridiculous than the present spectacle of picture producers hanging about New York theatres and publishing houses in the vain hope that something may dribble from one of them to be scooped up and brought to Hollywood.

\* \* \*

LUNCHEONED in the Warner Green Room with Olivia de Havilland and Beverly Roberts, two beautiful, charming and talented girls who will climb rapidly upward in the list of box-office favorites. They have everything—keen joy in the mere fact of their existence, sense of humor, enthusiasm for their jobs and boundless energy to back their ambitions. As a social function the luncheon might be described as a subdued riot.

\* \* \*

One of the most interesting plays I have seen on any stage is *Call It a Day*, now at El Capitan. Not only is it amusing as a comedy, but as a study in play construction it repays a visit to the theatre. It does not tell a story; rather it presents us with a portrait of a family, quite an ordinary family, from the time it gets up in the morning until it goes to bed at night. No character in it is dis-

tinguished for anything, yet each is diverting and the whole provides excellent entertainment. The fact that Violet Heming and Conway Tearle are its stars is a trick of the billing, as their roles are no more important than a half dozen others. Henry Duffy not only provides it with an imposing production designed and executed by Ernest Glover, but he reveals genius in its casting. By all means see it if you wish to enjoy a real treat.

\* \* \*

WHEN THE SCREEN was silent, twenty per cent of an exhibitor's revenue was sufficient to provide him with his picture programs. Today, with double-feature programs, his programs cost him thirty per cent of what he takes in at the box-office. And his average receipts are no greater than they were when he showed one silent picture. Hollywood is prosperous because it must make more pictures to keep abreast of the demands of double programs, but the exhibitors are not as prosperous as they used to be, a condition for which they themselves are to blame as they introduced the two-picture programs. But they did it in self defense, as one picture of the kind Hollywood is making no longer will attract paying patronage. It is a muddled situation. Where the business is heading is a subject for interesting speculation. I do not see how producers can continue to be more prosperous than the exhibitors upon whose prosperity their own depends.

\* \* \*

MAN MADE AN AIRPLANE and congratulated himself upon having accomplished something wonderful. Nature made a rose and laughed at Man.

Una Merkel

# What Another Reviewer Thinks of Them

By Allan Hersholt

IF MY memory serves me accurately, and I am sure that in this instance it does, no half-year period, since my commencement a decade ago to follow closely the industry's efforts, has been more notable from the standpoint of successful motion pictures than have the first six months of the present year. In speaking of successful pictures, I do not mean commercially successful.

Looking over the celluloid creations of that part of this year, I find that some important additions have been made to the history of cinema, notably *Pasteur*, *Green Pastures*, *Anthony Adverse*, each from Warners, *Ziegfeld*, *Ah, Wilderness!*, both from Metro, *Modern Times*, from Chaplin, *Show Boat*, from Universal, *Fauntleroy*, from Selznick, *Country Doctor*, from 20th Century-Fox, *Mr. Deeds*, from Columbia, and *Things to Come*, from Korda. Two of these, *Green Pastures* and *Anthony Adverse*, are yet to be released, but were completed and publicly previewed during the period in discussion, therefore are included in this January-to-July group. A perfect blending of all elements is what made most of these productions successful.

Had Alexander Korda's technical department fallen down on the job, *Things to Come* would not have been mentioned here. Apart from the fact that it displays greater technical wizardry than any film has so far this year, it merits inclusion in the class of history-making films because it reveals the enormous progress which the Anglican film empire, technically speaking, has made since Korda's arrival there but a few years ago. Thematically, the picture is decidedly unsuccessful, its plot woefully frail and childishly contrived. While the film's extraordinary technical exhibition wins for it a place in cinematic history, it does not keep it from being unworthy of classification as a satisfactory piece of entertainment. Director William Cameron Menzies has used his tools as skilfully as a master sculptor uses his chisels, and he has given us something as cold as the marble that the sculptor uses. Poor as the script was, it permitted the director to inject warmth and life in several places. What is the proper motion picture? Is it an unfeeling thing of camera angles, settings, lighting and photography, like *Things to Come*, or a throbbing, living, human thing, like, for example, *Ziegfeld*? Of course it requires little intelligence to answer that. While *Ziegfeld* and the British film are vastly different in point of narrative, I see fit to compare them as I have. The Metro production, technically, also is a truly superb accomplishment. Its director, Robert Leonard, too, has employed his tools with great skill, but, what is far more to his credit, he has breathed life and warmth into his work. In each of its departments does *Ziegfeld* achieve greatness.

*Modern Times* must be credited with serving as a brilliant example of how greatly a camera, aided by facial expression, can figure in telling a story, something of which most producers, directors and writers of today either are ignorant or which they have forgotten since silent cinema

disappeared. Many spectators have condemned this Chaplin picture because of the fact that it contains almost no dialogue, because it employs silent technique in the unfolding of its narrative. Personally, I found the lack of talk most refreshing. But the film, I know, would have been improved somewhat had dialogue been used in place of the few titles it contained. Even then, it would have been a motion picture and not a talkie. Chaplin's magnificent portrayal alone makes the production important in the 1936 chapter of screen history.

I have viewed David Selznick's *Fauntleroy* twice, it impressing me each time as being a picture not surpassed in intelligence of scripting, direction, acting, photography and art direction. Told with appropriate and charming simplicity, keen knowledge of humanness and emotion, fine taste and true understanding of camera-employment, it shines forth as a great triumph for each of those concerned in producing it. A beautiful and memorable translation of a widely-loved story.

When Metro purchased Eugene O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!* play, it acquired a pleasant little narrative which relied upon dialogue as its story-telling medium. Well acquainted with the O'Neill version, I feared it would come to us as a photographed stage play. It did not, for which great credit belongs to Clarence Brown, a director of much value to the industry alone for the fact that he realizes the screen is a visual art. True, the celluloid version of *Wilderness* possessed a large quantity of talk; it had to; but it combined that talk with cinematic brilliance. As a stage play, it missed greatness; on film, it touched greatness in its every sequence. A director's picture if ever there was one.

A production combining the talents of Frank Capra and Robert Riskin has yet to experience other than enormous success. Their *Mr. Deeds* is what we have come to expect from the industry's ace writer-director team: a masterpiece of humanness and humor. Unfolded with a good deal of dialogue, all brilliant, the picture is given much strength by intelligent use of the camera, the proper blending of these two elements making it a flawless talking motion picture. Under the direction of Capra, players often reach greater heights of naturalness than ever before. Gary Cooper's work in the title part is a fine example of that. Always an excellent actor, he appears to better advantage in *Deeds*, his first and thus far only film with Capra, than at any other time during his career. The down-to-earthness of *Mr. Deeds* gives it universal appeal, such being the case with all previous Capra-Riskin achievements.

In *Anthony Adverse*, the Warner Bros. corporation has a magnificent accomplishment, a production which will go down in screen history as presenting one of the most remarkable exhibitions of scripting and of direction of all time. In writing a screen play which does full justice to the Hervey Allen book, Sheridan Gibney has performed what many considered an utter impossibility. The picture will be remembered ten years from today as a monu-

ment to the directorial skill of Mervyn LeRoy, who heretofore has done nothing in which he even hinted at the tremendous heights to which he ascends in his handling of the production. Completely without flaws, the film has a great many merits of importance, and I should like to mention them all here, but the inclusion of more than half a dozen pictures in this article does not permit my comprehensively reviewing each.

Another superb achievement is Warner Bros.' *Green Pastures*, far superior, I feel, to the stage version, which is saying a good deal, as you know if it has been your good fortune to view the play. The picture holds the distinction with me of being the most fascinatingly unique and colorful one I have seen in years. Technically it is a masterpiece. Orchids and orchids to Warner Bros. for succeeding considerably beyond expectations with two such decidedly daring enterprises as this and *Adverse*. *Pastures* is a triumphant success for all involved, primarily for Marc Connelly and William Keighley, its directors, and for the Warner technical department. There is not the least cause for adverse criticism.

And still another unforgettable Warner Bros. production is *Pasteur*, which few filmgoers have failed to see and which has treated those viewing it to a rare cinematic treat. A human document with few peers, it blends perfectly its elements, acting, direction, writing, photographic work and all else deserving of high commendation. One thing that impressed me greatly in the picture is the manner in which dramatic moods are built up through superb use of camera and lighting, a noteworthy example of that being the silent scene wherein Pasteur watches over the rabies-stricken boy into whom he has injected serum; and another is the scene in which Pasteur has his stroke. Only masters in the art of cinema could have given us such a photoplay.

*The Country Doctor* cannot fail to be remembered in many years to come, and I do not mean solely because of the appearance in it of the Dionne quintuplets. One of the most remarkable sequences ever recorded on celluloid is possessed by this picture; it is that which concerns itself with the birth of the five babies. Only superlatives can do justice to the conception and execution of that sequence. A warmly human, often moving, often hilariously funny, cinematically magnificent production, it reflects great credit on its producers, writers, its director, players and its photographers.

The screen has offered very few operettas as meritorious as *Show Boat*, a production which, even without its music, would have been truly notable because of the several splendid exhibitions of screen art which it contains, because of its beautiful photography, magnificent pictorial composition, its outstandingly fine direction and acting.

THE 1936-37 schedules of our film producing companies call for 856 feature length pictures. Turning out almost two and a half pictures per day for a whole year should keep the wheels of Hollywood's industry revolving briskly. If we may judge by past performances, perhaps twenty or thirty of the new season's output will be outstanding productions and the rest will be dull, run-of-mill product, with here and there a class B picture that will reveal more picture brains than a score of the big ones.

## Some Late Previews

### *Great Accomplishment*

**NINE DAYS A QUEEN**, Gaumont British release of Gainsborough Production. Author, Robert Stevenson; directed by Robert Stevenson; photographed by M. Greenbaum; Costumes by J. Strassner; Wardrobe, Marianne; Period adviser, T. Heslewood; musical director, Louis Levy; dialog, Miles Malleon; editor, T. R. Fisher; art director, A. Vetchnsky. Cast: Sir Cedric Hardwicke, John Mills, Felix Aylmer, Leslie Perrins, Frank Collier, Desmond Tester, Gwen Ffrangeon-Daves, Martia Hunt, Miles Malleon, Sybil Thorndike, Nova Pilbeam. Running time, 86 minutes.

**K**ORDA'S *Henry VIII* is a great spectacle, rich in pomp and circumstance. Gaumont-British's *Nine Days a Queen* is a great motion picture, rich in heart interest. Each is a chapter from British history, the one presenting us with the portrait of a King with no personal appeal, the other laying bare the heart of a girl whom all the world will love. Dressed up as *Henry* was, the glitter and glamor of the royal court always in evidence, every scene emphasizing the whole's adherence to authenticity in incident and investiture, *Nine Days a Queen* still remains in essence just a simple motion picture which relates the tragedy linking the lives of people no less human because they are royal. Never before have I seen authentic history on the screen make so strong appeal to sympathy and understanding.

We have no one in Hollywood quite like Nova Pilbeam. We have girls of her age more nearly meeting the standards set for classic beauty, but none to match the soul that shines through her eyes or the acting ability she displays. The dictate of art that its mission is to conceal art is the natural endowment she brings to the screen. No actress is Nova as we see her—just a gentle English girl, whom fate cast briefly in the role of queen, then took her life. Her performance, if we may call it that, is amazing in its sincerity and power, its depth and understanding.

Another child who reveals remarkable ability to absorb a part, is Desmond Tester, a boy about the age of Freddie Bartholomew but a much greater actor. A king for a time without ceasing to be a boy, Desmond will find his way to the heart of any audience. John Mills, a youth, is another whose presence adds greatly to the humanness of the production.

But the picture is neither about children nor for children only. It is about pawns of history, of an epoch's human playthings, when death was the price of ambition's stumbling. Sir Cedric Hardwicke, one of England's seasoned veterans, the vigorous protestor of *Things to Come*, dominates the action by the strength of his dynamic though restrained performance.

But no one dominates the production as an example of modern cinematic art. The real hero is the camera which brings it all to us in the simple, understandable language the camera speaks, giving emphasis to dialogue and meaning to gestures. Robert Stevenson, author and director, acquitted himself superbly in both capacities. He contents himself with telling his story without dragging in non-essentials as our producers do—"comedy relief," for example. Gaumont-British has mounted the picture hand-

somely, and the film editor did a worthy job.

*Nine Days a Queen* is one of the screen's greatest achievements. It is coming to the Four Star. Its merits entitle it to run of months, but perhaps its lack of names well known over here will deny it such success. But do not be among those who do not see it. It would be denying yourself a treat.

### *Metro Masterpiece*

SAN FRANCISCO, Metro release of John Emerson-Bernard H. Hyman production co-starring Clark Gable and Jeanette MacDonald. Features Spencer Tracy, Jack Holt, Jessie Ralph, Ted Healy. Directed by W. S. Van Dyke; screen play by Anita Loos; from story by Robert Hopkins; photographed by Oliver T. Marsh; lyrics and music by Gus Kahn, Bronislau Kaper, Walter Jurmann, Nacio Herb Brown and Arthur Freed; dances staged by Val Raset; art directors, Cedric Gibbons, Arnold Gillespie, Harry McAfee, Edwin B. Willis; music director, Herbert Stothart; operatic sequences staged by William von Wymetal; film editor, Tom Held; Supporting cast: Shirley Ross, Margaret Irving, Harold Huber, Edgar Kennedy, Al Shean, William Ricciardi, Kenneth Harlan, Roger Imhof, Charles Judells, Russell Simpson, Bert Roach, Warren B. Hymer. Running time, 115 minutes.

TRULY A GREAT achievement. The picture leads us into the cataclysmic death scene of the old San Francisco, gives us a flash of its rebirth, and ends with a view of what it is to-day. Still, it is not a story of a city. It is a story of two people, as far apart as the poles in birth, early environment, upbringing—the daughter of a country parson and a young man born and raised on the notorious Barbary Coast. The mating instinct is the one thing they have in common. The growth of their romance is the story, the earthquake but an incident in it, a terrific, stunning incident, but so cleverly has the story been constructed and presented that our chief interest in it is its effect on the relations of the two young people.

*San Francisco* is Jeanette MacDonald's picture. This talented and beautiful young woman amazes us with the wide range of her versatility. The most impressive dialogue in the production is that spoken by her eyes and interpreted by the camera, fleeting, sensitive impressions more illuminating than any words could be. And her glorious voice is a golden strand that weaves its way through the stirring narrative and makes beautiful even the most sordid scenes in which it is heard. Jeanette is easily our greatest singing actress, the only one whose voice and dramatic powers reach the same superlative heights. *San Francisco* is a triumph for her. It is impossible to conceive of anyone else in the part.

Clark Gable's role reveals extraordinary skill in the fashioning of a screen characterization. Psychologically it is sound, its compliance with the code and traditions of the Barbary Coast being consistent and logical. In essence it is the portrait of a man whom all decent people should scorn, a vulgar trafficker in liquor, gambling and women's legs, a man who scoffs at God and all the niceties of life, but so well drawn is it and so understandingly enacted by Gable, that we accept his point of view and give him our sympathy throughout.

*San Francisco* is a great picture because it has taken these two opposite characters and has brought them together in a great way. Metro has given it one of the screen's most imposing productions. The earthquake se-

quences are a fresh revelation of the apparently endless ingenuity of our technical men. They are terrific, stunning, but in the shaking to pieces of a modern city the personal significance of the upheaval is not overlooked. It is made poignant by the cries of individuals seeking individuals, husbands frantically searching for wives, mothers for children. To Gable but one thing matters—the finding of Jeanette. Thus is the great disaster reduced to its simplest human terms.

Spencer Tracy plays a priest, a boyhood companion of Gable and the only one who understands him when both become men so far apart in everything except the bond of friendship which still exists. It is a fine performance that Spencer gives. Jessie Ralph has one scene which will live long in the memories of those who see it. She has other scenes, but none which gives her such an opportunity to reveal what a grand actress she is. Jack Holt also adds strength to the cast.

*San Francisco* is more than just an outstanding piece of motion picture entertainment. It is an illuminating lesson in screen writing, in adherence to the principle that the public is interested first in people, and that no matter how overwhelming a production is, it must not overwhelm the people for whom our sympathies have been enlisted. Also it is a lesson in how a picture should be directed. W. S. Van Dyke made a marvelous job of it.

### *It Keeps Moving*

PUBLIC ENEMY'S WIFE, Warner Brothers release of the Sam Bischoff production featuring Pat O'Brien, Margaret Lindsay, Robert Armstrong and Cesar Romero. Directed by Nick Grinde; screen play by Abem Finkel and Harold Buckley; from the story by P. J. Wolfson; photographed by Ernest Haller; art director, Hugh Reticker; editor, Thomas Pratt. Supporting cast: Dick Foran, Joseph King, Richard Purcell, Addison Richards, Hal K. Dawson, Harry Hayden, Alan Bridges, Kenneth Harlan, Selmer Jackson, William Pawley. Running time, 65 minutes.

ENOUGH excitement in this one to keep your attention from wandering. It is just another G-man story, more plausible than most of its predecessors. Pat O'Brien, hero, is after Cesar Romero, villain, and several times Romero turns the tables so adroitly we seem to be about to lose Pat. Only his status as hero of the story keeps him intact until the inevitable close-up showing him kissing the heroine. To the credit of the writers of the screen play is the plausible manner in which the in-and-out-of-danger incidents are presented. They do not bear the imprint of being contrived merely to keep the story going. But they keep the suspense going. *Public Enemy's Wife* is one of the best examples of sustained suspense we have had in a long time.

The cast is the most important yet given by Warners to Grinde to direct. He comes through with flying colors except in some instances when he permits the dialogue to be too loud. His handling of all the dramatic scenes is outstanding. To Thomas Pratt, film editor, is credit due for the rapid forward movement of the story.

There is but one piece of stupidity in an otherwise neat job. Dick Foran proposes to Margaret Lindsay while the two are dancing on a crowded floor. He almost shouts his proposal at her, his lines being delivered in a tone so loud everyone in the room could overhear them. He tells

her of his possessions, his yacht, polo ponies and wealth, his voice coming to us even from off-stage when the camera picks up O'Brien to show him overhearing the speech. It is a sorry exhibition of the lack of ordinary picture sense. Tenderness should be the dominant feature of avowals of love on the screen. Conversations of an intimate nature have no place on a dance floor when other couples are as close to the microphone as are the speakers. Such sequences are inserted to give pictures production value, but the ignorant manner in which they generally are handled more than offsets their pictorial value. Foran is characterized as a man of refinement and wealth, yet he gives an exhibition that would discredit an ill-bred lowbrow.

Pat O'Brien is at home in his G-man role in which he reveals real acting intelligence. In a few places he displays a tendency to talk too loudly, but on the whole his performance is excellent. Cesar Romero's characterization of a public enemy is nothing less than brilliant, being quiet, restrained, but forceful in its menace. We have some close-ups of him remarkable for their expressiveness and showing his complete absorption in his part. Margaret Lindsay is capable in the title role. Bob Armstrong is another who gives an excellent performance. Joseph King, who first attracted my attention as the police commissioner in *Bullets or Ballots*, is another who makes a big contribution to *Public Enemy's Wife*.

Ernest Haller gives us some effective photography and the Warner art department has mounted the picture in a highly creditable manner.

See *Public Enemy's Wife* if you enjoy having a lot of little chills chasing one another up and down your spine.

### Mr. Botsford Presents

THE RETURN OF SOPHIE LANG, Paramount release of Dario Faralla production. Features Gertrude Michael, Sir Guy Standing, Ray Milland and Elizabeth Patterson; directed by George Archainbaud; photographed by George Clemens; screen play by Patterson McNutt and Brian Marlow; from stories by Frederick Irving Anderson. Supporting cast: Colin Tapley, Paul Harvey, Garrey Owen, Don Rowan, Purnell Pratt, Ted Oliver, James Blaine. Running time, 65 minutes.

ANOTHER crook drama, handsomely mounted, capably acted and well directed. I have unbounded enthusiasm for screen entertainment, am easy to please and have no preferences in the way of story material. Perhaps, though, the fact that my recreational reading runs largely to murder mysteries would indicate a leaning toward the crook theme for motion pictures; but the truth is that I am getting fed up with crook productions. There are so many other things in life of more interest, clean things close to us, surroundings in which we can imagine ourselves, emotions we can share because we have felt them. The motion picture which appeals to us most is one into which we can project ourselves with a feeling of believing in it. Showing us how the other half lives is all right in its way, but the picture with the most universal appeal is one which shows us either how we ourselves live or would like to live.

*The Return of Sophie Lang* is a thoroughly satisfactory picture of its sort, one which reflects credit on all who had a part in its making, and if you still have any appetite for

crook dramas, you will find it sufficiently entertaining to return dividends on the price of admission. It is distinguished for an excellent, finely shaded and intelligent performance by the beautiful Gertrude Michael; a convincing crook characterization by Sir Guy Standing, and good work by Ray Milland who makes an agreeable leading man. Elizabeth Patterson's grande dame is one of the best things she has done.

A. M. Botsford has given the picture a smart and handsome production which the camera of George Clemens converts into a series of eye-appealing scenes. For all that it is a crook drama, there is nothing sordid about it, no corpses strewn its brisk forward path, nothing to "harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, and make each separate and combined lock to part and stand on end, like quills upon the fretful porcupine," as Shakespeare said about something else. In fact, *Sophie Lang* is one of the politest, best dressed crook offerings we have had.

George Archainbaud's direction is smooth and understanding. He could have improved one scene shared by Miss Michael and Standing if he had induced them to make more intimate their reading of lines in what was essentially an intimate conversation. The two discuss the stealing of a valuable diamond. The fact of there being no one within a reasonable hearing distance of them does not excuse the full and matter-of-fact tone in which they converse. You find the same weakness in many screen scenes. The significance of each scene should govern the delivery of lines. Lowering of voices when discussing a crime is the instinctive action of criminals, is what gives

Merle Oberon

*Kathleen  
and  
Gene  
Lockhart*

*Best Wishes*



JOEL McCREA

the conversation its dramatic strength. The audience can not attach more importance to a scene than its actors impart to it. Standing talks about the diamond as casually as he would discuss the weather, in a tone loud enough to suggest indifference to the possibility of his words reaching ears for which they were not intended. If two had conversed in low tones, what they said would have been given its full dramatic significance.

A small thing, perhaps—this one scene among so many—but if the tip of one of the noses in Rembrandt's *Night Watch* had been a little out of kilter, the painting would not be rated as one of the greatest masterpieces of all time.

*Harry Goes to College*

WE WENT TO COLLEGE, Metro release of Harry Rapf production featuring Charles Butterworth, Una Merkel, Walter Abel, Hugh Herbert and Edith Atwater. Directed by Joseph Santley; screen play by Richard Maibaum and Maurice Rapf from story by George Oppenheimer and Finley Peter Dunne, Jr.; photographed by Lester White; art directors, Frederic Hope, Paul Palmentola and Edwin B. Willis; film editor, James E. Newcom. Supporting cast: Walter Catlett, Charles Trowbridge, Tom Ricketts. Running time, 64 mins.

HARRY RAPF has made a motion picture out of college atmosphere. He brings a lot of old grads back to good ol' Danford, where they do over again the silly things they did during their college careers, and have a wonderful time doing them. Here and there through the jollity a slim story arises to the surface, holds its pose long enough to be recognized, then ducks out of sight to let the atmosphere go on.

*We Went to College* has one of Harry's complete and pictorially effective productions, and a goodly share of whatever measure of success it achieves may be credited to the camera. Milling crowds of capering graduates and undergraduates, outside and in the college buildings, form an animated background for the pleasing little story. People who are at college, were at college, and others who used to be young will find the picture entertaining. Those who still are young and are not at college may be disappointed with it as it is not the standard motion picture with its hero, heroine and villain. It is just good fun.

Hugh Herbert is permitted to be a little less goofy than is usual for him—just goofy enough to conform to the fictional conception of the absent-minded college professor. You will like him. Charles Butterworth is eccentric enough to be amusing as a comedian, but too eccentric to make us believe he would be an important figure in the personnel of the second largest brick manufacturing concern in the country. Walter Abel, by virtue of his ability and the importance of his role, carries off the acting honors with a really excellent performance. I like him better every time I see him.

Una Merkel always is a delight. Here she has opportunities to display her wares as a comedienne and makes the most of them. Edith Atwater gives a smooth and intelligent performance as Abel's understanding wife. Walter Catlett scores as a graduate who becomes a senator.

Joseph Santley's direction is highly creditable. He keeps things moving along joyously without making too much noise, quite a feat with such hilarious material.

## Weakness Made Weaker

THREE CHEERS FOR LOVE, Paramount release of A. M. Botsford production; supervised by M. A. Shauer; directed by Ray McCarey; screen play by Barry Trivers; from story by George Marion, Jr.; music and lyrics by Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin, Mack Gordon and Harry Revel; dances staged by Danny Dare; photographed by Harry Fischbeck; edited by Edward Dmytryk; art directors, Hans Dreier and John Goodman; musical director, Boris Morros. Cast: Eleanore Whitney, Robert Cummings, William Frawley, Elizabeth Patterson, Roscoe Karns, John Halliday, Grace Bradley, Veda Ann Borg, Louis Da Pron, Olympe Bradna, Billy Lee.

PARAMOUNT should recut this one, eliminate most of the story, all the "comedy," half of the tap dancing, and release the remainder as a short. There are about two reels of pleasant entertainment in it. It has been given a good production and Eleanore Whitney in the leading part reveals both charm and skill as a tap dancer, but her dainty ankles are not strong enough to carry the load of a weak story, made weaker by frequent interpolations of comedy which are pathetic exhibitions of screen writing at its lowest ebb.

Writing a good screen play, one which will be an outstanding box-office success when made into a picture, is something difficult to accomplish, but, surely, it is not difficult to write one in terms of the principles of screen play construction. The story should run in a straight line from beginning to end. That is the first law, applicable to both dramas and comedies. It does not preclude the injection of comedy interludes in dramas, if the comedy does not break the forward flow of the story. Dancing can have its place, as can songs if they are woven into the story pattern and become legitimate parts of it. If you have seen *San Francisco* you may have noticed that each of Jeanette MacDonald's vocal interpolations is a part of the story.

*Three Cheers for Love* is a class B production, but that does not excuse its disregard of story fundamentals. Whenever we become interested in the fates of the people the story deals with, Roscoe Karns is trotted out to do comedy turns that are the last word in silliness and have nothing to do with anything else in the story. That the story itself is a frothy, unbelievable one is of no moment. The most absurd, impossible story to appear on the screen in years was that which Rene Clair made into the brilliant *The Ghost Goes West*. But, if you recall it, you cannot put your finger on a spot where Clair stopped the story by trying to earn a laugh with something unrelated to it. We enjoyed *Ghost* because we entered into the spirit of it, because we met Clair half way and accepted what he offered with all the credence essential to our enjoyment of it as a bit of delicious humor.

It is a far cry, of course, from *Ghost* to *Three Cheers*, but the elemental laws of screen art apply equally to both, to every example of fictional entertainment presented on the screen, from a *Louis Pasteur* to a two-reel comedy. Something absurd is not funny, but something can be absurdly funny, and is permissible when it has a legitimate place in the story. The *Three Cheers* comedy is absurd and is a story intrusion.

And the picture ends with the boy and girl indulging in a fervent kiss in the presence of a large number of people. That gives you a good idea of the lack of intelli-

WARNER  
BAXTER



PAT O'BRIEN

## HENRY BLANKE

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

WARNER BROS.



## HARRY JOE BROWN

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

WARNER BROTHERS

gence displayed throughout the picture, of its sacred regard for the hackneyed situations which substitute for brains in screen productions.

Poor old Paramount! There is something pathetic about its ineptitude. Zukor and Le Baron have a job ahead of them to bring it back, but one would think their first steps would be in the direction of improved product. *Three Cheers* is a backward step.

### *Spectator's Theories Proven*

*SYMPHONY OF YOUNG LOVE*, an Elekta production; directed by J. Rovensky; produced in Czechoslovakia; music by Joseph Dobes. Cast: Vasa Jalovac, Jarmila Berankova, Jarmila Vojta, Voytova Mayerova, J. Svitak.

**E**LEKTA sends us from Czechoslovakia a picture which in 1934 won the Gold Cup at the annual Film Congress in Venice. The Gold Cup bears the same relation to all the pictures made anywhere that the Academy trophy bears to the pictures made in Hollywood. *Symphony of Young Love*, which you will have an opportunity of seeing at the Filmarte Theatre, has much in it which Hollywood could study to its advantage. It was made by people with picture brains, people who understand the medium in which they work.

To me the picture is interesting chiefly because at one place or another in it is demonstrated the soundness of every theory the SPECTATOR has advanced since the screen went talkie. The makers of the picture have made realities of the theories, and therein lies the strength of the production as an excellent example of screen technique. If I were not inhibited by my sense of modesty, I might mention that for years the names of Czechoslovakian film makers have been on the SPECTATOR subscription list.

That no reason exists why incidental speeches without story value should be recorded, has been claimed by the SPECTATOR. Here we have it demonstrated. Another of our claims is that sounds should be interpreted by music. In *Symphony of Young Love* is a sequence in which a number of men are searching frantically for a boy who is thought to be drowned. They are led by the boy's father who shouts directions at them. We do not hear his voice. We hear music, which makes the sequence more impressive and easier to listen to than would have been the case if we had heard the voice. This treatment, as the SPECTATOR has claimed persistently, could be applied to all pictures.

Another claim: The screen is not an acting art, as we understand the term "acting"; that its players need no training, their necessary equipment being solely the faculty for absorbing a part and responding emotionally to its demands. In this picture we have a boy and a girl, with no previous experience, who give the best performances because they become the people they are playing and are not hampered in their portrayals by the artificiality of recognized acting technique.

Another: There is too much dialogue in all our pictures, the dialogue having usurped the place of the camera as the screen's story-telling medium. In *Symphony* there is little dialogue, the camera telling nearly all the story. Incidentally, there is much beautiful photography in the production, although the print I saw does not do it full justice.



But it is by no means a perfect picture, even though it is a highly interesting one. For one thing, its makers give us too many impressionistic shots, long close-ups which try to tell us something we fail to get. Art can not be substituted for story in a motion picture. It is not a form of entertainment which should challenge our intellects. It should come to us, to our emotions, for absorption without mental effort. It was this quality which made silent pictures so spectacularly successful, and on the extent to which the film industry returns to it will depend its future financial stability.

### *Altogether Satisfactory*

M'LISS, Radio release of Robert Sisk production; directed by George Nicholls, Jr.; from book by Bret Harte; screen play by Dorothy Yost; photographed by Robert de Grasse; musical director, Kenny Holmes. Cast: Anne Shirley, John Beal, Guy Kibbee, Douglas Dumbrille, Moroni Olsen, Frank M. Thomas, Ray Mayer, Barbara Pepper, William Benedist, Arthur Hoyt, Margaret Armstrong, James Bush, Esther Howard, Louis Mason, Arthur Loft, Fern Emmett.

Reviewed by ALLAN HERSHOLT

RADIO gives us in this a notable picture, notable for its splendid direction and acting, its flawless writing and its fine photography and art direction. It is charming entertainment and a sufficiently worthy example of screen craftsmanship to warrant my suggesting that those interested in the cinema as a medium see and study it.

While this is definitely a talkie, it leans not infrequently on the camera as a story-telling aid. The dialogue is utterly realistic, confines itself to essentials and is delivered at all times with the highest possible degree of naturalness.

No small amount of commendation is due George Nicholls, Jr., his direction placing him several steps closer to the peak of Hollywood's directorial pyramid than he heretofore has been. He tells this Bret Harte story in a manner so that it compels the constant and close attention of the audience, revealing thoroughly fine taste, sound knowledge of the possibilities of the camera, giving the picture strength through the inclusion of a wealth of superb details, grouping his characters naturally, composing each scene in a fashion that brings out all its pictorial values and discloses true regard for drama. At no time does his handling of Harte's sentimental, familiar, trivial bit of hokum leave room for improvement. While I knew every turn the narrative was going to make, the picture held my complete interest.

Dorothy Yost has done excellently in her fashioning of the timeworn tale into a screen play, which Robert de Grasse has photographed beautifully.

Anne Shirley, in the title role, is on the screen almost continuously and presents an unusually outstanding exhibition of intelligent acting, unquestionably her best performance to date. John Beal's portrayal permits no adverse criticism, and Guy Kibbee, as Anne's father, offers the sort of characterization expected from him: human, sincere and convincing. Apparently Douglass Dumbrille, seen here in an interesting part, is incapable of giving anything but a superb performance. Barbara Pepper, Frank M. Thomas, William Benedict, Moroni Olsen, Ray

# PAUL PEREZ

... having completed, in collaboration, the original, adaptation and dialogue-continuity, respectively, of

EASY MONEY

WE WHO ARE

ABOUT TO DIE

THE LAST OF

THE MOHICANS

*is now writing an untitled screenplay for . . .*

WARNER BROS.-  
FIRST NATIONAL

## CASEY ROBINSON

WRITING

AT

WARNER BROTHERS

# HAL WALLIS

Associate Executive  
in charge of production  
WARNER BROTHERS

# LAIRD DOYLE

WRITER

UNDER CONTRACT TO  
Warner Bros.

Mayer, Arthur Hoyt, James Bush, Margaret Armstrong, Esther Howard and Louis Mason lend fine assistance.

*M'liss* is mounted with the completeness we have learned to expect of a Robert Sisk-Radio production.

## *Columbia Crusades Again*

COUNTERFEIT, A Columbia picture. A B. P. Schulberg Production. Story by William Rankin; screen play by Bruce Manning and William Rankin; director, Erle C. Kenton; assistant director, Arthur S. Black; photography, John Stumar, A. S. C.; sound engineer, Glen Rominger; film editor, Richard Cahoon; art director, Stephen Goosson; musical director, Howard Jackson; costumes, Lon Anthony; special camera effects, E. Roy Davidson. Cast: Chester Morris, Margot Grahame, Marian Marsh, Lloyd Nolan, Claude Gillingwater, George McKay, John Gallaudet, Gene Morgan, Pierre Watkins, Marc Lawrence.

By PAUL JACOBS

**S**TRONG adult entertainment, this one seeks a somewhat belated appeal through exposing G-men methods of tracking down queer-money makers. Bruce Manning and William Rankin, who plotted *Counterfeit*, overlook no opportunities for swift, dramatic action, even to the time-honored race to rescue the imperilled hero and heroine. The inevitable love angle is handled by the Misses Grahame and Marsh, and the equally inevitable but perennially annoying comedy relief is deftly executed by George McKay.

The woman element is brought in sensibly, but the comedy is injected with palpable strain. Some day, when other countries make the movie money by making motion pictures, a great light may fall upon Hollywood producers. Although the love sequences are extraneous to the central theme, presence of the weaker sex is legitimate for its strengthening of the danger element, but there is more than an admission's worth of interest without it. We enjoy an expose for the privilege of seeing what makes the wheels go round. It is fun getting on the inside. Comedy merely gets in our way.

Direction of Erle C. Kenton is commendable, as is John Stumar's photography. Chester Morris and Marion Marsh turn in capable but uninspired performances. Margot Grahame is stagey in her acting; Lloyd Nolan, as the ruthless leader of the counterfeit ring, seems at ease while being both cold-bloodedly inhuman and jovially likeable; a finely shaded performance. Claude Gillingwater, in his small role as the stomach-bothered engraver, does the neatest job in the cast.

Although *Counterfeit*, by stressing the basic plot, might have been made a super, it nevertheless will lend strong support to any double bill.

ONE FILM company is making a picture producer of a man who has had long experience in its legal department; another has engaged to make pictures for it a man who has had long experience in the theatre business. I hope that at least until after the first week in November, no studio will elevate to the rank of producer someone on its payroll who has had long experience in the various branches of picture making. Until the presidential election is out of the way we will have just about all the excitement we can stand.

## Away Below Average

THE BRIDE WALKS OUT, Radio release of Edward Small production; directed by Leigh Jason, featuring Barbara Stanwyck, Gene Raymond, Robert Young, Ned Sparks and Helen Broderick; screen play by P. J. Wolfson and Philip G. Epstein; from an original story by Howard Emmett Rogers; photographed by J. Roy Hunt; art directors, Van Nest Polglase and Al Herman; edited by Arthur Roberts. Supporting cast: Hattie McDaniels, Anita Colby, Vivian Oakland, Willie Best, Robert Warwick, Billy Gilbert. Running time, 75 minutes.

BEFORE sitting down to record my impressions of this BRKO picture I noticed a reference to it in *Los Angeles Times*, whose reviewer rates it rather highly as a bright piece of screen comedy. It made me wonder if, after all, anything is gained by taking such comedies seriously. For instance: The *Times* reviewer saw Barbara Stanwyck and Gene Raymond engage in a fervent kiss and a long embrace on a busy New York street without attracting attention heard them indulge in loud and vulgar quarrels which many people could overhear; saw Ned Sparks disgustingly chew a cigar and heard him intone in his monotonous voice for the entire length of the picture; saw the lovers press their lips on opposite sides of what must have been the filthy grating of a police patrol wagon—saw and heard all this, and still says *The Bride Walks Out* is a worthy screen offering.

Perhaps it is. But I do not think so. It impressed me as being a sorry affair, a sad sacrifice of the ability and charm of Barbara Stanwyck and the established talents of the rest of the cast. No director given a script containing such scenes as I have enumerated above, could make a picture worth seeing. Leigh Jason made a valorous attempt to realize what values it possessed, and I do not blame him for its shortcomings.

There was a thought in the original story by Howard Emmett Rogers, but the screen play wrought havoc with it. Jason maintained a lively pace and whatever entertainment values the picture possesses are due to his heroic struggles.

As I viewed it I kept wondering why its makers failed to realize the obvious possibilities of the story. All it needed was a modest display of cleverness in the construction of the screen play. Edward Small spent a lot of money in providing an adequate and attractive production, and Roy Hunt's photography, particularly in some close-ups, is of high quality, but, on the whole, the picture is a sorry piece of entertainment.

IT LOOKS TO ME as if producers are about to overdo Shakespeare as a screen author. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has earned a profit by the force of the exploitation given it. It derives its greatest box-office strength from the contribution the camera made to it, and not from the matchless beauty of its lines. Language alone, even Shakespeare's, will not make pictures successful. And beauty of production in itself ceases to be box-office when audiences get too much of it. Only stories told principally in action which the camera can record will assure satisfactory box-office returns. Perhaps one or two more Shakespearean offerings may make money, but beyond that there is little hope for them.

## EDWARD LUDWIG

DIRECTING

Joel McCrea and Jean Arthur

in

ADVENTURES IN MANHATTAN  
FOR COLUMBIA

From Welford Beaton's Review of *Fatal Lady*

- *It puts Ludwig in the first ranks and entitles him to handle only important productions. He is equally at ease in handling drama, melodrama and romance, and reveals an understanding of the emotional value of his script. He makes dialogue passages merely conversations, the one thing more instrumental than any other in giving a picture the intimate appeal it must have to give greatest satisfaction to an audience.* □

## LEW AYRES

Directed

Hearts in Bondage  
a Republic Picture

*Lew Ayres can take much credit for his first directorial effort. He has done a job of which any seasoned director would be proud.*

—Film Daily.

▲ - ▲

*Lew Ayres deserves a palm for his reality in doing something for the world at large as his first directorial assignment. It's a masterful job.*

—Daily Variety.

▲ ▲

Also Starring in  
Paramount's  
*Lady Be Careful*

★ ★ ★

Compliments of  
ROBERT Z. LEONARD

★ ★ ★

LEIGH JASON

Director

R K O



LOVE ON A BET  
THE BRIDE WALKS OUT

Now Preparing a  
LILY PONS MUSICAL

RED KANN, commenting in *Motion Picture Daily* on *The White Angel*, writes: "Since (seeing it) in mentally reviewing its high merits, we have been endeavoring to determine how it compares with *Pasteur*. The answer is still in the jury room." When the jury comes out I think Red will find the verdict will be, that while the two are equally meritorious as screen creations, *White Angel* has greater appeal by virtue of its theme possessing greater heart interest. We admire a great scientist for the discoveries he makes, but we love a great nurse for the things she does.

\* \* \*

IF YOU WOULD enjoy a piece of brilliant satirical writing, by all means get *Patriotism Prepaid*, (Lippincott) which I presume has reached the bookstores. It is by Lewis J. Gorin, Jr., National Commander, Veterans of Future Wars, that most amusing adventure of Princeton University students into the realm of national affairs. Young Gorin gives his sense of humor full play by presenting the cause of future veterans in a serious vein. He demands for them, their future wives and children, everything in sight, bonus, pension, medical care, and the herding into concentration camps for the duration of peace, of all men between 18 and 35 who refuse to join the Veterans of Future Wars. And he wants everything now, cash on the dot, without all the trouble the veterans of the last war encountered in getting their bonuses. *Patriotism Prepaid* may not convert you, but it certainly will entertain you.

\* \* \*

THE REOPENING of Baron Long's hospitable establishment at Agua Caliente would be pleasant news to those Hollywood people to whom the resort meant something beside a place where one could gamble. It is not the mere fact of having crossed an international boundary line that gives the visitor to Caliente the feeling that he is in a foreign country. There is something about the place, the Spanish atmosphere, the grounds, the architecture of the buildings, the sleepy hills which roll away from it, which induces that feeling of lazy detachment from daily routine affairs at home which is essential to the completeness of the holiday spirit. And I have seen nothing so beautiful as the still water of the swimming pool on a moonlight night. I once wrote of Agua Caliente that "The atmosphere of old Spain seems to hang over it like a hushed note in a symphony of glamorous yesterdays."

\* \* \*

WHEREVER shown, *Fury* is receiving most enthusiastic reviews in the newspapers. As far as I know, the SPECTATOR is the only paper which rated the picture as poor entertainment. The public apparently regards it in the same way. Despite the rave reviews and the special exploitation given it by both distributor and exhibitors, *Fury* is doing badly at the box-office. Another picture which the SPECTATOR did not like, but which the Hearst papers, oddly enough, are extolling to the skies and giving extra space to, is *Hearts Divided*, the Marion Davies vehicle. It also is faring poorly at the box-office.

\* \* \*

SOMETHING SHOULD be done to those who keep their radios going long after normal people are in bed. Returning late from a preview and weary from the day's activities, I sought the surcease of slumber, only to be kept

awake by an insistent radio. True, its tone was subdued, but I could hear it, and could not sleep. Finally I dressed and set out to trace the disturbing element to its source, composing, as I dressed, the biting things I was going to say to the offending neighbor who sought to amuse himself at the expense of my rest and good humor. My ears led me to my garage. I had neglected to turn off the radio in my car. There was something pathetic about it—Genevieve sitting there in the dark, singing to herself far into the lonely night.

### PICKING THE WINNERS

(Continued from page 3)

mer Daves; play by Robert Emmet Sherwood; photographed by Sol Polito; art director, John Hughes; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein. Supporting cast: Genevieve Tobin, Dick Foran, Humphrey Bogart, Joseph Sawyer, Porter Hall, Charley Grapevin, Paul Harvey, Eddie Acuff, Adrian Morris, Nina Compana, Slim Thompson and John Alexander.

**CAPTIAN BLOOD**, Warners release of Harry Joe Brown production. Directed by Michael Curtiz; screen play by Casey Robinson; from the Rafael Sabatini novel; photographed by Hal Mohr, art director, Anton Grot; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; special score by Erich Wolfgang Korngold; assistant director, Sherry Shourds. Cast: Errol Flynn, Olivia de Haviland, Lionel Atwill, Basil Rathbone, Ross Alexander, Guy Kibbee, Henry Stephenson, Robert Barrat, Hobart Cavanaugh, Donald Meek, Jessie Ralph, Forrester Harvey, Frank McGlynn, Sr., Holmes Herbert, David Torrence, J. Carroll Naish, Pedro de Cordoba, George Hassell, Harry Cording, Leonard Mudie, Ivan Simpson, Stuart Casey, Dennis D. Auburn, Mary Forbes, E. E. Clive, Colin Kenny, Maude Leslie, Gardner James and Vernon Steele.

**ANTHONY ADVERSE**, Warners release of Henry Blanke production. Stars Fredrick March. Directed by Mervyn Leroy; from novel by Hervey Allen; screen play by Sheridan Gibney; music by Erich Wolfgang Korngold; photographed by Tony Gaudio; assistant director, Bill Cannon; Opera in Leghorn by Monteverde; Opera in Paris by Franchetti; film editor, Ralph Dawson; art director, Anton Grot; gowns by Milo Anderson; opera sequences staged by Natale Carossio; music director, Leo F. Forbstein; special photopgraphic effects by Fred Jackman. Cast: Olivia de Haviland, Donald Woods, Anita Louise, Edmund Gwenn, Claude Rains, Louis Hayward, Gale Sondergaard, Steffi Duna, Billy Mauch, Akim Tamiroff, Ralph Morgan, Henry O'Neill, Pedro De Cordoba, George E. Stone, Luis Alberni, Fritz Leiber, Joseph Crehan, Rafaela Ottiano, Rollo Lloyd, Leonard Mudie, Marilyn Knowlden, Mathilde Comont, Eily Malyon, J. Carrol Naish, Scotty Beckett, Paul Sotoff, Frank Reicher, Clara Blandick, Addison Richards, William Ricciardi, Grace Stafford.

**THE GREEN PASTURES**, Warners release of Henry Blanke production; directed by Marc Connelly and William Keighley; fable by Marc Connelly; suggested by Roark Bradford's Southern Sketches, **OL' MAN ADAM AN' HIS CHILLUN**; photographed by Hal Mohr; art direction by Allen Saalburg and Stanley Fleischer; film editor, George Amy; special photopgraphic effects by Fred Jackman; assistant director, Sherry Shourds; choral music arranged and conducted by Hall Johnson, with the Hall Johnson Choir. Cast: Rex Ingram, Oscar Polk, Eddie Anderson, Frank Wilson, George Reed, Abraham Gleaves, Myrtle Anderson, Al Stokes, Edna M. Harris, James Fuller, George Randol, Ida Forsyne, Ray Martin, Charles Andrews, Dudley Dickerson, Jimmy Burgess, William Cumby, Ivory Williams, David Bethea, Ernest Whitman, Reginald Fenderson, Slim Thompson, Clinton Rosamond.

**THE WHITE ANGEL**, Warners release of Henry Blanke production. Stars Kay Francis. Directed by William Dieterle; photographed by Tony Gaudio; art director, Anton Grot; musical direction by Leo F. Forbstein; screen play by Mordaunt Shairp; original story by Michel Jacoby; dialogue director, Stanley Logan; gowns, Orry-Kelly; assistant director, Frank Shaw. Supporting cast: Ian Hunter, Donald Woods, Nigel Bruce, Henry O'Neill, Billy Mauch, Charles Croker-King,

## D. ROSS LEDERMAN

### DIRECTING

### FOR

### COLUMBIA



## MARK SANDRICH

*Directed*

GAY DIVORCEE  
TOP HAT  
FOLLOW THE FLEET

*Now Preparing*

PORTRAIT OF A REBEL  
*with*

KATHARINE HEPBURN

WATCH YOUR STEP

*with*

FRED ASTAIRE *and*

GINGER ROGERS

Under Contract to R.K.O.

## FRANK McDONALD

*Directed*

### THE SONG OF A NATION

*Technicolor Historic Short*

FOR WARNER BROTHERS

*Frank McDonald gives this little masterpiece inspired direction. It is evident that his heart was in his work, that both patriotic and romantic impulses governed his handling of scenes.—*  
Welford Beaton in Hollywood Spectator.

*Now Directing*  
THREE IN EDEN

## OTTO BROWER

*Directing*

POSTAL INSPECTOR

*For*

UNIVERSAL

Phoebe Foster, George Curzon, Georgia Caine, Ara Gerald, Halliwell Hobbes, Eily Malyon, Montagu Love, Ferdinand Munier, Lillian Cooper, Egon Brecher, Tempe Piggott, Barbara Leonard, Frank Conroy, Charles Irwin, Clyde Cook, Harry Allen, George Kirby, Harry Cording.

UNDER TWO FLAGS, 20th Century-Fox release of Darryl Zanuck production. Associate producer, Raymond Griffith. Co-stars Ronald Colman, Claudette Colbert, Victor McLaglen, Rosalind Russell. Directed by Frank Lloyd; battle sequences directed by Otto Brower; screen play by W. P. Lipscomb and Walter Ferris; from novel by Ouida; photography by Ernest Palmer and Sidney Wagner; art direction, William Darling; settings by Thomas Little; musical direction by Louis Silvers; costumes, Gwen Wakeling; assistant directors, Booth McCracken (on battle scenes), Ad Schaumer and A. F. Erickson. Supporting cast: Gregory Ratoff, Nigel Bruce, C. Henry Gordon, Herbert Mundin, John Carradine, Lumsden Hare, J. Edward Bromberg, Onslow Stevens, Fritz Leiber, Thomas Beck, William Ricciardi, Frank Reicher, Francis McDonald, Tor Johnson, Gwendolen Logan, Harry Semels, George Regas, Hans Von Morhart, Jamiel Hasson, Nicholas Soussanin, Jack Pennick, Gaston Glass, Douglas Gerrard, Frank Lackteen.

THE GREAT ZIEGFELD, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Produced by Hunt Stromberg; directed by Robert Z. Leonard; screen play by William Anthony McGuire; dances and ensembles staged by Seymour Felix; special music and lyrics by Walter Donaldson and Harold Adamson; Harriet Hocter; ballet music by Con Conrad; lyrics by Herb Magidson; musical direction by Arthur Lange; arrangements by Frank Skinner; art direction by Cedric Gibbons; associates, Merrill Pye, John Harkrider and Edwin B. Willis; gowns and fashion parades by Adrian; photographed by Oliver T. Marsh, George Folsey, Karl Freund, Ray June and Merritt B. Gerstad; recording director, Douglas Shearer, film editor, William S. Gray; produced by Hunt Stromberg. Cast: William Powell, Myrna Loy, Luise Rainer, Frank Morgan, Fannie Brice, Virginia Bruce, Reginald Owen, Ray Bolger, Ernest Cossart, Joseph Cawthorn, Nat Pendleton, Harriet Hocter, Jean Chatburn, Paul Irving, Herman Bing, Charles Judels, Marcelle Corday, Raymond Walburn, A. A. Trimble, Buddy Doyle.

THE GHOST GOES WEST, United Artists release of London Films production; stars Robert Donat; features Jean Parker and Eugene Pallette; directed by Rene Clair; screen play by Robert E. Sherwood; from story by Eric Keoun. Supporting cast: Everly Gregg, Elsa Lancaster, Hay Petrie, Morton Selton, Elliot Mason, Patricia Hilliard, Jack Lambart, Colin Leslie, Richard Mackie, J. Neil Moore and Neil Lester. Cameraman, Harold Rosson; art director, Vincent Korda.

SHOW BOAT, Universal release of the Carl Laemmle, Jr., production, featuring Irene Dunne, Allan Jones, Charles Winninger, Paul Robeson, Helen Morgan and Helen Westley. Directed by James Whale; screen play by Oscar Hammerstein, II, from his stage play; original story by Edna Ferber; music and lyrics by Jerome Kern and Hammerstein; photographed by John J. Mescall; dance numbers staged by Le Roy Prinz; edited by Bernard Burton and Ted Kent; special photography by John P. Fulton; musical director, Victor Baravelle. Supporting cast: Sammy White, Hattie McDaniel, Patricia Barry, Marilyn Knowlden, Arthur Hohl, J. Farrell MacDonald, Charles Wilson, Queenie Smith; Donald Cook, Francis X. Mahoney, Sunnie O'Dea, Charles Middleton, Clarence Muse, Mae Beatty, Harry Barris, Stanley Fields.

MR. DEEDS GOES TO TOWN, Columbia. Story, Clarence Budington Kelland; screen play, Robert Riskin; director, Frank Capra; assistant director, C. C. Coleman; photography, Joseph Walker, A.S.C.; film editor, Gene Havlick; musical director, Howard Jackson; art director, Stephen Goosson; special camera effects, E. Roy Davidson; costumes, Samuel Lange; sound engineer, Edward Bernds. Cast: Gary Cooper, Jean Arthur, George Bancroft, Lionel Stander, Dougless Dumbrille, Raymond Walburn, H. B. Warner, Ruth Donnelly, Walter Catlett, John Wray, Margaret Matzenauer, Warren Hymer, Muriel Evans, Spencer Charters, Emma Dunn, Arthur Hoyt, Christian Rub, Jameson Thomas, Mayo Methot, Gustav von Seyfertitz.

# PAUL SLOANE

DIRECTING  
for  
PARAMOUNT



# Henry Hathaway

Directed  
LIVES OF A BENGAL LANCER  
TRAIL OF THE LONESOME PINE  
FOR PARAMOUNT

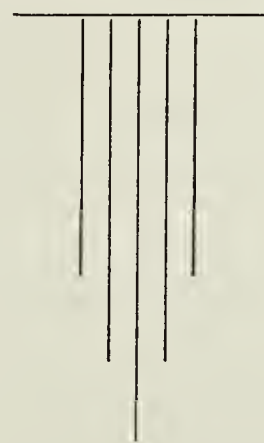
# E. A. DUPONT

UNDER CONTRACT TO  
PARAMOUNT

—  
Currently Directing  
A SON COMES HOME

# ROBERT FLOREY

DIRECTING  
FOR  
PARAMOUNT



*Current Direction*  
HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD



**YOU'LL CRY! AND YOU'LL LOVE IT!**

Bride . . Queen . . Martyr . . All In Nine Days

**CEDRIC HARDWICKE  
NOVA PILBEAM**

**NINE DAYS A QUEEN**

*(The Story of Lady Jane Grey)*

**JOHN MILLS    DESMOND TESTER  
SYBIL THORNDIKE**

Director-Author, Robert Stevenson

*A*  *Production*



"Delighted to be able to tell you how much I enjoyed 'Nine Days A Queen'. This story of Lady Jane Grey is beautifully done in every respect and should go a long way towards popularizing these fine actors with American audiences. My congratulations to all who produced this picture."

**IRVING THALBERG**

"One of the best pictures ever made in any country is 'Nine Days A Queen', the story of Lady Jane Grey."

**LOUELLA PARSONS**

"Because little Lady Jane is my favorite character, and her love story my favorite love story...I was a tough audience ...I ended up in tears on my knees...I sincerely believe that it is one of the great pictures."

**ADELA ROGERS St. JOHNS**  
*"Liberty"*

**AMERICAN PREMIERE · HOLLYWOOD · SOON ·**



*Hollywood*

20  
CENTS

# S P E C T A T O R

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Vol. 11

JULY 18, 1936

No. 8

## What Paramount Requires for its Rehabilitation

## We Travel and Meet a Most Amazing Family

## Fred Stein's Highly Entertaining New York Spectacle

### REVIEWS OF

Suzy

Give Me Your Heart

The Devil Doll

Down the Stretch

Charlie Chan at the Race Track

Bengal Tiger

White Fang

Our Relations

### SUMMER DISPENSATION

July and August are slowing-up months, when the outdoors is in our minds, our reading is neglected and we do only the work we can not escape. The educational institutions which use the SPECTATOR in their motion picture appreciation classes, are closed for the summer, previews slow up, and the Editor is afflicted with summer lassitude. Feeling it is our duty to do something about the combination of circumstances here outlined, after grave consideration we have decided to meet the emergency by turning out an abbreviated SPECTATOR during the two let-down months—twelve pages instead of the usual sixteen. We feel that twelve pages will be as much as anyone will want to read, and we know darned well it is as much as we want to write. In September we will be hitting again on all sixteen.

AMERICA'S ONLY PUBLICATION DEVOTED SOLELY TO THE SCREEN AS AN ART



From the

# Editor's Easy Chair



THE FILM INDUSTRY'S folly is forcing it to be wise in its search for story material. But it not yet has developed enough wisdom to understand what is wrong with it. Its product is not holding its audience, and it thinks the reason is the lack of plays, novels, and short stories available for making over as motion pictures. With that touch of modesty so characteristic of them, our producers refuse to take credit for the brilliance of their failures. Playwrights and authors have failed them and they have been forced at last to take the SPECTATOR'S ten-year-old advice to buy original stories. There are available just as many playwrights and authors as there always have been. The classics, which producers claim will yield nothing further, could furnish enough material for ten years of picture making. And the purchase of all the originals available will not take the industry out of its slump. It does not lack stories. It lacks the brains to know what to do with stories when it buys them. It thinks it is in the motion picture business, because, for lack of any other term, their productions are called motion pictures. There is a tremendous potential audience for motion pictures, but Hollywood is not reaching it. The kind of product it is turning out will not increase its present audience—in fact, will not hold its present audience. Paramount's plight, for instance, will continue to the point of the company's extinction unless it gains understanding of the ailments of its pictures and revolutionizes its entire production program to make its product conform to the demands of true screen entertainment.

\* \*

THE SCREEN is not a medium merely for presenting books and plays, or even original stories, in the form and in the language in which they first appeared. It has a language of its own, differing totally from those of literature and the drama. A knowledge of the screen, not of literary and dramatic values, is essential to the intelligent selection of story material for motion pictures. Producers have fallen into the habit of putting stories and plays, instead of motion pictures, on the screen. What they call a story shortage is due to the scarcity of material that lends itself to such literate reproduction. If they thought in terms of their own medium, each of the big organizations could go into its own files and find enough story material to last it for ten years. The majority of pictures being offered now lack sufficient entertainment value to repay the time it takes to view them, but I can not recall when I last saw a screened story which could not have been made into an acceptable motion picture. It is not the story that is

important in a picture; it is the manner in which it tells what story there is—the degree in which it is permitted to express itself in its own language. It is a language of pictorial symbols, the first language employed by man to convey impressions. Because the screen employed such an elemental and universal language it gained a larger audience than all the other mediums of entertainment combined, yet Hollywood today, and from the inception of its great industry, is and has been totally unaware that the screen has a language of its own.

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WE ARE GETTING more notable, more imposing productions in a given period now than in any similar period in the past, but at the same time we are getting more bad pictures than ever before in the history of screen entertainment. Producers are pinning their hopes on the few epics and neglecting the many small pictures. Each of the class B productions I have seen during the past year could have been made highly entertaining if ordinary picture brains had figured in its making. Adolph Zukor is not going to restore Paramount to even a semblance of its past glory by trying to provide a greater spectacle than *Ziegfeld* or a greater heart-throb than *White Angel*, a greater phantasy than *Midsummer Night's Dream* or a greater biography than *Pasteur*. He can do it only by making motion pictures which relegate the microphone to its rightful place as a mere supplementary device, and not, as it is being used now, as the chief story-telling medium. But he will not do this, nor will he bring prosperity back to Paramount. He shares the conviction of his fellow producers that when the screen gained a voice it went out of the motion picture business and went into that of selling imitations of the stage.

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THE PECULIAR FEATURE of the present state of affairs is that a motion picture in which the microphone is used intelligently, is far easier to make than the talkie we are getting now. If Mr. Zukor would forget his two million dollar productions and think only in terms of those costing two hundred thousand, and see that the cheaper ones are made intelligently, he would find that Paramount's prestige ultimately would be restored by them. To the sitter on the sidelines the situation is interesting. Some producer some day is going to wake up, is going to realize he is overlooking a good bet by not getting back into the business of producing visual entertainment, and all the others will run true to Hollywood traditions and hasten to imi-

tate him. But I think it will take a long time as I do not know any producer with enough wisdom to become wise.

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 ONE WOULD THINK Mr. Zukor and his fellow producers would have no difficulty in finding out for themselves why it is easier to make with the camera a picture that will please an audience than it is to make with the microphone one which will give the same pleasure. For one thing, the talkie has made the film audience one of critics. When pictures were silent we sat comfortably in our seats and watched the story glide across the screen, taking it in with our eyes, absorbing it with our emotions, our intellects being at rest. If the hero had forgotten to lace his left shoe, we did not notice it as our critical sense was not on the alert. The talkie keeps us alert. We lean forward to get it, our attention keen not to miss a word, to catch every inflection of every voice. The good comes to us with the bad; both must stand inspection by our minds, the realism of dialogue and mechanically reproduced sounds depriving our imaginations of playing a part in entertaining us. Naturally a critical audience is harder to please than a non-critical one. Even if telling stories with the microphone were not an infraction of the basic principles of the art upon which the film industry depends for dividends, it is so unwise from a commercial standpoint that we can rate the executives responsible for it only as an exceedingly stupid and incompetent lot.

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 BRITISH PRODUCERS who are so anxious to engage Hollywood players with names which can lend box-office value to their casts, are overlooking a good bet in not taking advantage of something our Hollywood producers are overlooking. Every time there is an opportunity to demonstrate it, the fact is established again that names prominent in silent days have not been forgotten by film patrons. Talkie-made American stars are asking more money than producers can pay them to appear in British pictures. The old silent stars can be engaged for very little as they are anxious to do anything to bring them back. The inference is obvious.

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 ANOTHER SCOUT has gone forth from Hollywood to look for motion picture talent among players appearing in summer stock throughout the East. Sometimes I think it would be a good idea for the Hays organization to make a tie-up with a first rate lunacy commission and have its members examined. Enough talent to last for the next decade is in Hollywood now, the kind of talent, inexperienced in stage ways, that producers need, yet scouts are sent far afield to round up the kind of talent Hollywood should not use. Homes, shops and offices can yield more promising young players than Hollywood ever will be able to find on theatre stages. Producers need personalities, not actors or actresses. Personality needs no training to express itself. Personal charm is nine-tenths of the equipment of our leading box-office favorites. All personality needs is an outlet, an opportunity to express itself. A home registers the combined personalities of its occupants, a business the personality of its head. I know a man whose personality is expressed by an inn.

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 ALWAYS ON MOTOR TRIPS to and from San Francisco I stop over night at Santa Maria Inn. It was my habit for

some years before I was aware what its proprietor looked like. But I felt I knew him, that he was a friend. His place spoke aloud of his personality. That he was reserved, self-effacing, perhaps shy, was attested by the trees and shrubs which shielded his inn from the passer-by on the highway. That he was fond of flowers was shown by the gorgeous display of bloom that made his dining room a perpetual flower show. That his disposition was a cheerful one was impressed upon me by the cheerfulness of every one of the inn's employees. In no other stopping place here or abroad have I found such striking evidence of a dominating personality expressing itself. It seemed to run all the way from the arrangement of the towels in the bathrooms to the verdure of the surrounding grounds. Finally I met Frank McCoy. I had written something about his inn and received from him a note asking if I would inquire for him on my next trip. When I met him I could not recall having seen him before. He is never behind his counter, never greets his guests except those who ask for him. He allows his inn to speak for itself, and its voice is one of comfort and cordiality.

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 IF FRANK MCCOY had adopted the screen as his medium of expression, the charm of his personality would have made him an outstanding box-office favorite; he would have sent his audience away with the same feeling of complete satisfaction with his performance as his guests have when they stop at his inn. The only person he strives to please in the conduct of the inn is himself. He floods the place with flowers because he loves flowers. He serves superlative meals in a superlatively beautiful dining room because he likes to eat such food in such surroundings. He equips his rooms with the most expensive beds because they are the kind he likes to sleep on. The best of taste is displayed in every detail because he is a man of good taste. He has been successful financially because he does not think in terms of money. The bell boy who showed us to our rooms on our last visit, told us that on the first of May every employee of the inn had received an extra check for half a month's pay. I asked him why. "Oh," he replied, "Mr. McCoy just told us April had been a good month and we might as well have a little extra money." The people of Santa Maria Valley are a quiet, peaceful lot, but I imagine if anyone wished to commit suicide, a sure method of doing it would be to stand on a corner in the town and in a loud voice cast aspersions on the name of Frank McCoy. If I were within hearing distance, I would heave a rock myself.

\* \* \*  
 FRANK DROVE US ALONG some of the valley roads. We stopped at the place of Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Nichols where we beheld the startling beauty of twenty acres of blooming gladiolus. It is something you have to see. You can not imagine it. The Nichols are in the gladiolus bulb business, cultivating them for the leading seed firms of the world. There are over four thousand varieties of gladiolus. Less than one hundred, the choicest of the lot, are grown by the Nichols. Recently they scoured the world for new varieties, received bulbs of one hundred and sixty three new ones, planted and grew all of them and picked three as the only ones worthy to place among the Nichols aristocrats of the gladiolus world. We saw one gorgeous

bloom developed by the Nichols and the bulbs of which sell for five dollars each, which is not a great price when you consider that in the whole wide world there are only eight stalks of this variety growing at the moment. After a while as the family increases the bulbs will become more plentiful and work their price range down until finally even an editor can buy one. The Frank McCoy, named for our host, sweeps its class at Eastern flower shows, but is just another good one out here. Around Los Angeles gladiolus bulbs should be planted in January. The Nichols ship their bulbs in December. They find their way through dealers to all parts of the world.

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WE LEFT THE GLADIOLUS display and drove along the Valley of Gardens until Frank turned into a driveway towards a house whose roof we could see among the trees. He took us into the house and introduced us to the family. On the wall opposite the entrance to the living room was a large oil painting which attracted my attention for the boldness of its conception and the artistic quality of its execution. The father had painted it, I was told. It hung between two others, both gems. Son John had painted them. Mother, we were informed, was in her studio, and we started upstairs to meet her. The stairway was hung with superb etchings and old prints, gifts to the family from various artists. At the head of the stairs I stopped before an oil portrait. "My wife," said our host, "painted by my daughter Mary." It was striking portrait which only a real artist could paint. In the studio we found Mother with a tiny handsaw cutting a design in a square of silver which was to be one link in a woman's belt. The completed links revealed rare craftsmanship. Around her were scattered some exquisite examples of her skill in tooling leather and also some pieces of pottery which she had molded. Mary told me her mother also sang at church and concerts, and wrote poetry. By this time John had opened a cabinet drawer and lifted from it a great portfolio of examples of his work in lithography, and wood and linoleum block-printing. We were shown also two superb creations which he had done in tempera, a difficult medium to work in as the colors when dry are not the same shade as when applied wet to the canvas.

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OUR NEXT VISIT was to the studio of Valentin, another son, seventeen years of age. He was busy at his hand loom, weaving cloth fit to be made into a garment for a king. He showed us some beautiful designs he had woven for women's handbags and scarfs. The loom itself was a fine piece of work. The family made it. Son David, 18, came in. He plays the cello and composes music, the while studying to become a real composer. Mary, he told us, also composes and plays the piano. Then someone else told us that Valentin creates his own designs for the fabrics he weaves, forms his own color combinations and does his own dyeing. Back in the living room, Elliott, 13, sat at the grand piano and with intelligent feeling and expression played for us Cyril Scott's *Vesperate*, a quiet piece with a slight suggestion of bells in it. We insisted upon an encore, so he played with fine musical sense Greig's *Minuetto Movement, Sonata in E. Minor, Opus 7*. Then Mary sat down and played one of her own compositions.

SUCH WAS OUR introduction to the most amazing family it ever was our good fortune to encounter, the family of Mr. and Mrs. Stanley G. Breneiser, of Santa Maria, California. He is the head of the art department of the Santa Maria High School and she is on the teaching staff. The family is not remarkable as much for the things its members do as for the manner in which they do them. Each is a real artist doing really notable work. They do not consider themselves artists yet. They still are students. Valentin, the weaver, for instance, went to Santa Fe to learn about weaving from the McCrossens, the greatest weavers in the Southwest, and is saving his money to go to a school in San Francisco where fine weaving is taught. The family is a happy, joyous one, very much alive, with a suggestion of delightful irresponsibility and a well developed sense of humor. While still in a whirl of amazement at the revelation of the family's talents, I inquired meekly if by chance anyone in the household knew how to cook. "Cook?" exclaimed Mrs. Breneiser "we're all splendid cooks—that is, all but Valentin. He can make only muffins, but they are excellent muffins. David cooked all our meals for a year, and the next time you come you must sample my apple pies." I have kept for the last the most important member of the family, Cathryn, aged two, and adored by the others. Outside the front door of The Ark, as the Valley calls the Breneiser residence, is a lily pond. "Aren't you afraid the baby will fall into it?" I asked Mrs. Breneiser. "Oh, she falls into it lots of times," was the reply. "She fell into it yesterday, but she swam out." Completing the household are two dogs and a cat.

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ACCORDING TO THE United States Department of Commerce, the vital statistics of the motion picture industry are as follows: capital investment \$2,000,000,000; provides employment for 270,000 people; has an annual revenue of \$700,000,000 from paid admissions, \$220,000,000 from film rentals; pays the government \$100,000,000 per year in taxes, exclusive of state and municipalities taxes on real estate and land values; annual expenditures for advertising, \$70,000,000 domestic, \$30,000,000 foreign; insurance paid, \$30,000,000 annually; 13,386 theatres operating throughout the United States; average weekly attendance in United States, 80,000,000 (When talkies were at the peak of their popularity, attendance reached 120,000,000, weekly.)

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SOMETIMES I WONDER what the circulation of the SPECTATOR really is. I know the number of copies printed every two weeks, but I have no way of knowing how many readers it has per copy, the number of readers constituting the true circulation of a publication. Many schools and colleges subscribe for more than one copy as they found one was worn out before all those wishing to read it could be accommodated. Barbara L. Bowman, of Oakland, California, writes, "I find the SPECTATOR valuable in the selection of motion pictures. Your reviews, editorials and comments are educational and stimulating. We need your courage and independent spirit." Point is given to these remarks in connection with the subject of SPECTATOR circulation by the fact that the selection of motion picture she mentions is for a group of organizations

consisting of the Federation of Women's Clubs, D. A. R., P. T. A., National Council of Catholic Women, Council of Federated Church Women, National Council of Jewish Women, King's Daughters, State Federated Council of Colored Women, Public Welfare League, League of Women Voters, W. C. T. U. It will be seen that the SPECTATOR'S influence can not be rated on the basis of copies sent to the post office.

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THE MAGAZINE *Time*, in a printed record of the first year of its newsreel, *The March of Time*, lists Irving Thalberg, David Selznick, Darryl Zanuck and Walter Wanger as Hollywood's production geniuses. Of the ten best pictures made in Hollywood during the first six months of the current year, Thalberg made none, Selznick one, Wagner none, while out at Warner Brothers Hal Wallis, not numbered among the geniuses, made five. Is genius a matter of opinion or performance?

## Some Late Previews

### Excellent Entertainment

SUZY, Metro release of Maurice Revnes production. Stars Jean Harlow, Franchot Tone, Cary Grant. Features Lewis Stone, Bonita Hume. Directed by George Fitzmaurice; screen play by Horace Jackson, Lenore Coffee, Dorothy Parker and Alan Campbell; from novel by Herbert Gorman; musical score by Dr. William Axt; music by Walter Donaldson; lyrics by Harold Adamson; photographed by Ray June; assistant director, Sandy Roth. Supporting cast: Reginald Mason, Inez Courtney, Greta Meyer, David Clyde, Christian Rub, George Spelvin, Una O'Connor, Charles Judels, Theodore Von Eltz, Stanley Morner. Running time, 90 minutes.

ROMANCE, drama, war, espionage, Jean Harlow, Franchot Tone, Cary Grant, ample production and the direction of George Fitzmaurice—such are the ingredients of *Suzy*, compounded on the Metro lot and soon to be turned loose on the world at large. It will give satisfaction. We could wish for less talking than it contains, and a greater reliance on the camera in developing the psychological phases of the story, but as we seem doomed to have such pictures until Hollywood learns how to use the microphone, we will be lucky if we get none less entertaining than this well made Metro offering.

The chief merit of the excellently written script is the businesslike manner in which the story is told, the contrasting elements being woven into an easily flowing narrative free from non-essentials. There are intensely dramatic moments as well as some melodramatic physical thrills. The picture, in fact, has something of everything in it, being fashioned in a manner that should make it satisfactory entertainment for any kind of audience, and as no picture can be better than its direction, we may credit Fitzmaurice with having done a most creditable job. Praise is due Ray June for photography of distinction.

Performances are excellent. Jean Harlow at all times is in complete command of her role which runs the gamut from light comedy to stark tragedy. I do wish, however, that they would do something with Jean's eyebrows. The thin, pencilled lines, resembling eyebrows seen only in

caricatures, caught my attention when first she appeared, and thereafter I could not keep my eyes off them.

Franchot Tone grows in stature with his every performance. Always the perfect gentleman, intelligent, personable, never in word or gesture does he suggest the actor. Cary Grant, too, is something more than just a leading man. Since his outstanding performance in *Sylvia Scarlett*, his talents for varied characterizations have been recognized, and in each new venture he makes good. Here we have him as a philandering aviation hero, a part to which he does full justice. Benita Hume is effective as a war spy.

The final scene in the picture as I saw it is the only story weakness. Grant has been killed and the scene shows us his funeral. We hear a long eulogy which robs the scene of the impressiveness it would have had if its treatment had been more intelligent. There is no reason why we should hear the words of praise accorded the dead hero. A long shot to establish the fact of the speech being made, appropriate music to make it reasonable we should not hear the speech, close shots to register the emotions of some of the mourners, and sympathetic camera treatment of the entire sequence, would have made it a great screen moment. We can expect such blundering just as long as producers are governed by their obsession that the microphone is their principal tool. Here they use it to commit a cinematic crime.

### Of Rare Quality

GIVE ME YOUR HEART, Warners release of Cosmopolitan production; supervised by Robert Lord. Stars Kay Francis and George Brent. Directed by Archie L. Mayo; screen play by Casey Robinson; from the play by Jay Mallory; photographed by Sidney Hickox; assistant director, Sherry Shourds; art directors, Max Parker and C. M. Novi; gowns, Orry-Kelly; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein. Supporting cast: Roland Young, Patric Knowles, Henry Stephenson, Frieda Inescort, Helen Flint, Halliwell Hobbes, Zeffie Tilbury, Elspeth Dudgeon. Running time, 87 minutes.

CASEY ROBINSON'S brilliantly written screen play starts this one off with a sequence which will delight those who can recognize screen art in its pure form, and will give fresh hope to those looking forward to the time when we again will see motion pictures on the screen. Not a word is spoken in the opening sequence nor is any sound reproduced mechanically. Our eyes absorb the story significance of the scenes as we listen subconsciously to sympathetic music. That is the kind of entertainment that made the film industry great.

Robinson goes as far as he can with wordless scenes, and the terseness of the first dialogue we hear, as well as the pauses which space the short speeches, would indicate it was with reluctance that he took up the use of spoken words in the telling of his story. *Give Me Your Heart* is a psychological treatment of a compelling and deeply human theme: An unwed mother yields her baby to the wife of its father. For all that it is purely psychological and first appeared as a stage play, Robinson throughout is sparing in his reliance on dialogue and gives the camera prominence in the development of the story. The picture is an intelligent use of talkie technique, one of the best examples of it ever to reach the screen.

The delicate theme, which so easily could have been made censorable, is handled throughout with the best of

taste, there being nothing in it to offend the most narrow-minded purist. Archie Mayo's direction is superb. He develops with rare understanding all the cinematic possibilities of the script, groups his characters for pictorial effectiveness and has them speak their lines in conversational tones which make the dialogue scenes impressive. Only occasionally does the artificiality of the stage diction obtrude itself, a weakness inevitable as long as the screen relies so largely upon stage players who have not adapted themselves to the new and totally different medium.

The production is one vastly to the credit of the Warner studio, from which we have learned to expect only the most meticulous attention to details and fullest appreciation of the value of the visual quality of its screen entertainment. The picture is a succession of beautiful scenes, of artistic sets tastefully dressed, spread on the screen with photography of outstanding quality. All Sidney Hickox's camera work is superb, but I was impressed particularly with his skill as a portrait artist. His close-ups make his subjects live on the screen.

The combination of a masterly script, intelligent direction and realistic photography, rids the picture of all suggestion that the people we see are actors playing parts. We see only persons at crises in their lives, ordinary human beings obeying their impulses and trying to grope their way out of a tangle in which fate has involved them. No blame can be attached to anyone and each carries our full sympathy. All of which means the performances are perfect. There is no let-down in Kay Francis's stature by her step from the Florence Nightingale role to that of an unwed mother, which is the warmest praise that can be accorded her performance. George Brent never appeared to better advantage. He reveals an intellectual grasp of the significance of the part he plays. Roland Young, in the role of chief motivating character, is a tower of strength to the production. Henry Stephenson, Frieda Inescort, Helen Flint and Patric Knowles are others whose work leaves nothing to be desired.

The picture was made under the supervision of Robert Lord, one of the most versatile executives in Hollywood. Between chores as supervisor he writes original stories from which worthy pictures are made. *Give Me Your Heart* gives him rating as an outstanding producer. But I wish he would explain the title. I could not figure out whose heart is solicited on behalf of whom.

### *Mickey Rooney Triumphs*

DOWN THE STRETCH, Warners release of First National production. Supervised by Bryan Foy; directed by William Clemens; story and screen play by William Jacobs; dialogue director, Gus Shy; assistant director, Drew Ebersson; gowns by Milo Anderson; photography, Arthur Todd. Cast: Patricia Ellis, Mickey Rooney, Dennis Moore, William Best, Gordon Hart, Gordon Elliott, Virginia Brissac, Charles Wilson, Joseph Crehan, Mary Treen, Edward Keane, Raymond Brown, Andre Beranger, Bob Tansill, Frank Faylen, Robert Emmett Keane, Charles Foy, Crauford Kent, Jimmy Eagles.

**M**ICKEY ROONEY is one of the finest actors appearing on the screen. As I mentally review this morning his performance in *Down the Stretch*, which I saw last night, I place it among the few flawless ones I have seen of late. Young Rooney asks no concessions from anyone because he is a boy. No adult actor we have is such a

master of his art that he could not learn something to his advantage in studying the convincing naturalness of Mickey Rooney's jockey in this picture about race horses. There is no over-acting, no suggestion of the stage in anything he does. His gestures, his eyes, the reading of his lines at all times are governed by his emotions. He is the perfect screen actor because he makes his emotions visible and because he is too young to have had the strength of his natural endowment lessened by having learned how to act.

Despite some obvious drawbacks, *Down the Stretch* is well worth seeing on account of Rooney's contribution to it. The chief weakness of the story is its ending which shows Rooney deliberately throwing a race to assure victory for a horse owned by a girl who had befriended him. People all over the world bet on the Ascot Cup, lovers of racing always wish to see the best horse win, yet Rooney, with victory in his grasp, and carrying the sympathy of all who see the picture, disregards racing ethics and common honesty by brazenly fouling and giving the race to a horse which did not earn it.

Rooney's father had been ruled off tracks for crookedness, and the theme of the story is that the sins of the father should not be visited upon the son. Because he is his father's son, Rooney faces tremendous odds in gaining the confidence of owners. That is the story. We sympathize with him in his climb upward, yet in the end he shows us he is as crooked as his father could have been. It is queer story-writing.

Another weakness of the story is the manner in which comedy interludes are handled. Every time dramatic or emotional values are developed, William Best, an excellent colored comedian, is advanced to the front to destroy such values. A more judicious handling of his really creditable comedy would have strengthened the picture.

But, on the whole, Bryan Foy, producer, made a passable job of it. It is rich in production values and has some thrilling race sequences. The work of William Clemens stamps him as a director with a future. Not one scene leaves room for criticism. He is equally at home with drama, heart interest and comedy, and handles dialogue intelligently. He wastes no time in telling his story, and maintains a fast tempo throughout.

Patricia Ellis is pleasing as the girl who befriends Rooney, and all the other performances are satisfactory.

### *Quite Extraordinary*

THE DEVIL-DOLL, Metro release of Edward J. Mannix production. Stars Lionel Barrymore; features Maureen O'Sullivan and Frank Lawton; directed by Tod Browning; screen play by Garrett Fort, Guy Endore and Eric Von Stroheim; from story by Tod Browning, based on novel, 'Burn, Witch, Burn,' by Abraham Merritt; musical score by Franz Waxman; photographed by Leonard Smith. Supporting cast: Robert Greig, Lucy Beaumont, Henry B. Walthall, Grace Ford, Pedro de Cordoba, Arthur Hohl, Rafaela Ottiano, Juanita Quigley, Clara du Brey, Rollo Lloyd, E. Allyn Warren. Running time, 70 minutes.

**W**HEN IT ENTERS the field of speculative imaginings the screen leaves all other arts and sciences far behind. For instance: What if someone were given power to reduce people to one sixth their size? What could he do with the people thus reduced, a man one foot high, a woman ten inches high? Well, what of it? you may

ask. If in your time you have not imagined far sillier things than that, you deprived your intellect of a lot of exercise it needed.

But to get back to our premise. What would such people look like in their relation to normal people? An artist could give us on canvas his individual impression of their appearance; a sculptor could present a rigid group molded to scale, and scientists could express their views in a verbal maze, but the screen can show us the living, breathing little people moving among others of normal size. It does it in *The Devil Doll*. It reduces the people before our eyes, and by way of thumbing its nose at the other sciences for their indecencies, it reduces their clothes along with their bodies, which is an all-time shrinkage record.

Then the screen goes ahead and answers our secondary imagining: What could be done with such people? Of course, it shows us only one thing, as it could not expect us to sit in a picture house for the months it would take to put them through all their possible paces. It shows us how they could be used as instruments of revenge of a particularly gruesome variety. And in doing so Metro overlooked an opportunity to give us one of the most amusing comedies ever to reach the screen. As an antidote for *The Devil Doll*, I would suggest to the producers that it is not too late yet to give us *The Angel Doll*, thus realizing the greatest entertainment qualities of its extraordinary technical feats.

The camera really is the hero of *The Devil Doll*, and the demonstration of its powers makes the picture well worth seeing, even though the story is unpleasant and will leave you with a bad taste in your mouth. Lionel Barrymore in a particularly arresting performance brings Arthur Hohl down to one-foot stature and uses him to terrify Pedro de Cordoba into confessing that Lionel was innocent of the crime for which he had served seventeen years in prison. And he uses a ten-inch Grace Ford to wreak horrible vengeance on Robert Greig, as well as to steal a lot of Claire du Brey's jewels. But the sight of Grace using the heel of a woman's slipper to mount a stool from which she scrambles up to where the jewel case is, is entertainment of a compensating sort. And when Arthur hovers under Peter's chair to jab him with a poisoned stiletto if he does not confess, you will get goose-flesh.

It is all weirdly extraordinary, but, I repeat, the same devices should have been used in the manufacture of a comedy to which you could have taken the children and with them enjoyed the time of your several lives. As we have it, however, do not take the children.

The picture is well made and Tod Browning's direction is brilliant. Rafaela Ottiano's characterization is one of the outstanding features. The delectable Maureen O'Sullivan and the engaging Frank Lawton share a romance which strikes the pleasantest note in the production. In not keeping Lawton before the public, producers are overlooking a young man who could become a great favorite.

\* \* \*  
EARL FOXE has a good idea. He wants Metro to splice together all the cut-outs left over when *The Great Ziegfeld* finally was edited, and release it as an encore to its big attraction.

## Mr. Charles Chan-Oland

CHARLIE CHAN AT RACE TRACK, 20th-Fox release of John Stone production. Directed by H. Bruce Humberstone; screen play by Robert Ellis, Helen Logan, Edward T. Lowe; from story by Lou Breslow and Saul Elkins; based on 'Charlie Chan' character created by Earl Derr Biggers; photographed by Harry Jackson; art direction, Duncan Cramer; assistant director, Aaron Rosenberg; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Warner Oland, Keye Luke, Helen Wood, Thomas Beck, Alan Dinehart, Gavin Muir, Gloria Roy, Jonathan Hale, G. P. Huntley, Jr., George Irving, Frank Coughlin, Jr., Frankie Darro, John Rogers, John H. Allen and Harry Jans. Running time, 70 minutes.

ORDINARILY when viewing a murder mystery film we are treated to the crime, than we view the finger of suspicion making a tour until enough footage has been accumulated, after which the finger is laid on a certain shoulder and we go home. The *Chan* series follows much the same formula. The finger of suspicion points in about the same number of directions, but our interest in the *Chan* picture is held by the entertaining manner in which the episodic incidents are welded into a smoothly running whole by the ingratiating performance of Warner Oland.

Did you ever stop to think that the screen has but two character institutions—Charlie Chaplin's tramp and Warner Oland's Chinese detective? Both, apparently, could go on forever. I do not recall a *Chan* story that was notable as an example of screen writing, but I can not recall a *Chan* picture which did not entertain me. In this new one the philosophic detective goes to the races and there stages his usual dramatic solution. The racetrack background provides the producers with an opportunity to employ without pay the many thousands of extras to be found in newsreel clips of race fans to give impressive bulk to the production.

The picture has been produced on an ambitious scale and Bruce Humberstone's direction is well up to the standard set by the series. It is well cast, being so generous with its supply of speaking parts that there are a number of characters which the story does not seem to account for. There is a romance entwined in the narrative, but I can not recall what connection the parties to it had with any of the other characters.

However, the thing that counts is that the picture is good entertainment chiefly because of Oland's always excellent performance.

## Disgraceful Entertainment

BENGAL TIGER, Warners Brothers release of the Bryan Foy production. Directed by Louis King; screen play and original story by Roy Chanslor and Earl Felton; photographed by L. William O'Connell; art director, Esdras Hartley; film editor, Harold McLernon. Cast: Barton MacLane, June Travis, Warren Hull, Paul Graetz, Joseph King, Don Barclay, Gordon Hart, Carlyle Moore, Jr. Running time, 63 minutes.

THIS PICTURE will appeal strongly to all except people with instincts of decency. If you can view with satisfaction the vicious prodding of a caged beast to demonstrate the bravery of its trainer, if you would enjoy seeing the terrified beast being dragged through a fire, if you can be entertained by a sodden drunkard being responsible for the mauling to death of a fiend by a tiger the drunkard had infuriated, if you like to see a bridegroom,

hopelessly drunk, being carried to bed on his wedding night—if all this is your idea of choice cinematic fare, by all means see *Bengal Tiger*, a late offering from the Warner studio.

To those organizations which use the SPECTATOR reviews as an aid to determine what pictures to recommend to their members, I would suggest that in each community an effort be made to enlist the support of the Society For the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in an effort to prevent the showing of *Bengal Tiger*. If the Hays organization were not so busy protecting the feelings of politicians, rendering impotent the screen as a medium for exposing crookedness in high places and dictating the length of screen kisses, I would suggest this Warner picture as worthy of its scrutiny. Perhaps, though, as a tiger figures in it, Mr. Hays will refrain from tackling it through fear of ruffling the delicate sensibilities of Tammany Hall.

*Bengal Tiger* not only is a shocking exhibition of pandering to the lowest taste in an effort to make money, but also is an exhibition of extraordinary stupidity in picture making. If instead of drunkenness being its motivating force, the psychological possibilities of the story had been developed and the same degree of excellence in direction and acting had been exercised, the picture could have attained high degree as screen entertainment. The production is a good one and all the performances are above criticism. Louis King's direction is outstanding. All the physical merits, however, seem only to accentuate the demerits of the story, the whole being an objectionable offering that reflects shame on the organization which so recently gave us the thoughtful *Pasteur*, the sacred phantasy *Green Pastures*, the imposing *Anthony Adverse* and the heart warming *White Angel*.

### Successful Comedy

OUR RELATIONS, Metro release of the Stan Laurel production for Hal Roach co-starring Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy. Directed by Harry Lachman; screen play by Richard Connell and Felix Adler; from the story by W. W. Jacobs; adaptation by Charles Rogers and Jack Jevne; supervised by L. A. French; photographed by Rudolph Mate; settings by Arthur I. Royce and W. L. Stevens; edited by Bert Jordan. Supporting cast: Alan Hale, Sidney Toler, Daphne Pollard, Betty Healy, James Finlayson, Iris Adrian, Lona Andre, Ralf Harolde, Noel Madison, Arthur Housman. Running time, 65 minutes.

Reviewed by ALLAN HERSHOLT

A PROMINENT reason for the lengthy and huge success experienced by Laurel and Hardy as screen comics is the fact that they have relied more upon pantomime than upon dialogue to bring laughter. Their newest film, *Our Relations*, while offering a larger dose of talk than has any previous effort of the pair, again clearly reveals their discerning belief that a cinematic comedy at its best is mainly pantomimic. But few of their gags in it are disclosed through the medium of spoken lines and then in such a manner that the audience is permitted to laugh without loss of comedy values. For example, a speech expected to receive audience response is followed by a stretch of pantomimic business. Consequently the picture avoids the important, frequently-committed fault of topping a laughter-winning piece of dialogue with another humorous one and thereby drowning the second in laughs.

Skipping merrily through *Relations* is an undeniably successful brand of humor. Genuinely witty, blissfully absurd, neatly, spontaneously and unconventionally told, it is quite the brightest, most steadily enjoyable feature offering yet to come from Stan and Ollie. It sparkles continually with unhackneyed wit and not once threatens to lose the brisk tempo established at its start. Both stars achieve tremendous success in their dual roles, never having been better and seldom as good.

*Relations* is a triumph for Harry Lachman, its director, who exhibits an exquisite perception of humor, keen knowledge of timing and that same artistic sense which has contributed memorably impressive and distinctive moments to his past efforts, this film's night-club scenes, in particular, demonstrating his outstanding ability to create commanding pictorial artistry. He has not permitted the narrative to become secondary to gags, which displays sound judgment and which is an uncommon thing to report about a director of this sort of film.

W. W. Jacobs' satisfactory story has been adapted and woven into script-form excellently by Richard Connell, Felix Adler, Charles Rogers and Jack Jevne. Hal Roach has not stinted the production, and Rudolph Mate is credited with some magnificent camera work, photographic effects being supplied by Ray Seawright.

Alan Hale's work, in a prominent role, is utterly fine, as always. Sidney Toler, Betty Healy, Daphne Pollard, James Finlayson, Lona Andre, Iris Adrian, Noel Madison, Ralf Harolde and Arthur Housman give completely satisfying performances.

*Our Relations* marks Stan Laurel's debut as a producer-actor, and an unusually fine beginning it is.

### Good One From Zanuck

WHITE FANG, Twentieth Century-Fox production, by Jack London. A sequel to THE CALL OF THE WILD. Personally produced by Darryl F. Zanuck; associate producer, Bogart Rogers; directed by David Butler; screen play by Gene Fowler, Hal Long and S. G. Duncan; photography, Arthur Miller, A.S.C.; art direction, William Darling; set decorations by Thomas Little; assistant director, William Forsyth; film editor, Irene Morra; costumes, Royer; sound, Joseph Aiken and Roger Heman; musical direction, Arthur Lange. Cast: Michael Whalen, Jean Muir, Slim Summerville, Charles Winninger, Jane Darwell, John Carradine, Lightning, Thomas Beck, Joseph Herrick, George Ducount, Marie Chorre.

Reviewed by ALLAN HERSHOLT

THE possessor of a locale which has experienced wide popularity with readers and screen audiences, this almost wholly transparent Jack London story makes its cinematic appearance as a drama that should give satisfaction to spectators everywhere. Responsible considerably for its success is David Butler's interpretation of the Gene Fowler-Hal Long-S. G. Duncan screen play, it being much to the credit of this director that one's interest and admiration are sustained completely.

Butler, a director with an intelligent grasp of all phases of screen expression, has unfolded the narrative superbly, making of the production an example of story-telling which a good many of his confreres in the industry well may benefit by studying. With true and equal authority he has handled drama, comedy and romance. While the story owns a wealth of situations that a good many direc-



tors would feel justified in presenting with heroic gestures, loud dialogue and with emphasis on drama, Butler has resorted to none of these methods. Apparently realizing the drama to be inherently dramatic enough in itself to require no stressing, he has grouped and moved his characters naturally and wisely has seen to it that their dialogue is spoken in conversational tones, with the result that each moment comes in an utterly realistic manner. The picture reveals that he and the authors of its script deem the camera an important factor in the presentation of a screen story, several scenes of importance relying more upon camera than upon talk and thereby gaining greater strength than they would have achieved had dialogue been employed mainly. Suspense is maintained consistently.

William Darling, Thomas Little and the 20th Century-Fox art department merit high commendation for providing the picture with settings that preserve splendidly the Alaskan atmosphere brilliantly captured by London in each of his *Frozen North* works. Arthur Miller's camera has done full justice, realizing pictorial possibilities and giving us a succession of beautiful shots. Camera work throughout is in perfect harmony with the mood of the story.

Writers Fowler, Long and Duncan have contributed some adroit scripting, dialogue being a most notable part

of their work, never lacking naturalness and containing few unnecessary words.

Michael Whalen, in the principal role, is entirely praiseworthy, portraying his part without any suggestion of acting. The characterization shines far brighter than any I have seen him give and lends considerable strength to my belief that the not-far-off future will find him an important star. Jean Muir, as is her custom, performs with intelligent restraint and true sincerity, offering a portrayal that is delightfully human. Slim Summerville again is a joy, lending much successful humor to the film, humor that never is forced. The villainy supplied by John Carradine stands out eminently. Jane Darwell's part is neither large nor important, but it gains importance by the splendid manner in which she plays it.

Charles Winninger does a fine job of presenting his farcically comical character, and Thomas Beck, seen but briefly in the opening sequences, makes a lasting impression through his excellent performance. Lightning, a beautiful police dog entrusted with the title role, offers quite the most intelligent piece of acting yet to come from an animal. Joseph Herrick, George Ducount and Marie Chorre are other players worthy of mention for good work.

The musical score, Arthur Lange's direction of it and the costuming of Royer are assets to the picture.

## The New York Spectacle

BY  
FRED STEIN

New York, July 14.

IN THE SPECTATOR of June 6th, at the close of his review of *Trouble for Two*, the editor says, "If he (Louis D. Lighton) had included a few faults I could grumble about, I could have made his picture look more important by devoting more space to it." I trust that this additional space devoted to the picture will please both Mr. Lighton and Mr. Beaton. Among films which are straightforward narrative this one ranks very high. The one great regret to those who participated in making this picture must be that Stevenson could not have seen it. There is one particular moment during the story which merits especial attention, because it gives a fine illustration of one of the many things which only cinema can do in telling a story. We watch the duel between the crown prince and his adversary as it rages from one corner to another of that gloomy old room. Now we see the one, now the other, then both together in their desperate encounter. Not only the action of the duellists, but also and especially the movement of the camera build up the impression of a terrific struggle. If these two were duelling on the stage it would all be far more slow and far less effective than it is here, where the ordinary movement of the actors is qualitatively multiplied many times by the manipulation of the camera from one point to another.

Then, when the tension is nearly at the breaking point, the director uses the camera again in a way which is specifically cinematic. We see the sword of the villain as it drives past the prince's head and buries its tip into the wall. Now we expect to get right back to the duellists, who have evidently fought their way to another part of

the room, but instead of doing this we continue to look, for ten agonizing seconds, at that hole in the wall. What does this mean? What is happening? Has one of them been killed? Our brains race and our nerves jangle and our anxiety heaps higher. Then suddenly the camera swings us out into the garden and we see from this position a shot of the doorway with the villain in full retreat into the open and the prince close upon him. We shout inwardly with joy and relief that we have missed nothing—and this treatment of the shot, which is of the essence of cinema, has given us another great moment.

\* \* \*

At this time of the year, when the legitimate Broadway stage begins to lapse into the summer doldrums, it is the custom of various committees, critics and other cognoscendi to pick the best play of the year. I will not attempt to form any conclusion as to which this best play was, because in one way this process is like deciding which among bananas, oranges and peaches is the best fruit. A banana is a banana and an orange is an orange, and there are excellent specimens of each to be found. One type of play is quite different from another, and it would be quite as absurd, for instance, to say that *Winterset* is a better play than *Boy Meets Girl* as it would be to state that a potato is a more divine creation than a pumpkin.

Another regrettable habit of critics and the public, which must always have a best of every human category to idolize, is the tendency to pick out and label one actor or actress as the greatest of the season or of the age. It should be quite obvious that before we could be entirely

fair in our choice of the best actor playing at any given period, we would have to realize that each player is limited or inspired by the lines the author has given him, that the direction, the *mise en scène*, the cooperation of the other actors and the response of the audience, as well as the basic effectiveness of the play itself, are all factors which color and influence a performance.

Following upon this logic we would have to demand that each leading contestant for the honor should rehearse and play the parts of his nearest competitors, so that our verdict would be scientifically more exact. Moreover, even if a committee sitting in judgment were to go to this extent in its search for the truth, there would still be disagreement among its members. As an example to illustrate my point, I may mention that I saw Katherine Cornell, who is generally acclaimed as the first lady of the American Theatre, in a performance of *Saint Joan* at Boston a few weeks ago, and where I had expected to see histrionic sparks there was only an occasional sputter. Now, before I can be sure as to whether Miss Cornell is or is not over-rated, I would like to see her play Mattie in *Ethan Frome*, the Queen in *Victoria Regina*, and a few other of the great parts which have been created this season. Then I would be interested in seeing Helen Hayes and Ruth Gordon in the rôle of the Maid of Orleans, and finally, we would be getting somewhere.

If we will limit ourselves to choosing the actor and actress who in our opinion gave the best performances during the past season, remembering always that even here many qualifications must be applied to the choice if it is to be just, then we may be able to arrive more closely to the truth. A good performance is one which most completely represents to the audience the character portrayed. If I were called upon to decide which was the best acting of the year I would place the Lorbeerkrantz upon the brows of Richard Bennett and Ina Claire, whose performances in *Winterset* and *End of Summer* were equally magnificent and equally unsurpassed. While on the subject I might add that I also have some Liederkrantz to award, and though I will not mention any names, those who deserve it probably know who they are, and they may come to my house for the prize at any time they wish.

\* \* \*

It is not often that ideas of any consequence come to me while sitting in a night club. As a rule the combination of pretty women, repetitious rhythm and menacing waiters is a completely satisfactory antidote to thought. The other night, however, as I was gazing dully at a menu without particularly seeing it, there was a blinding flash within my brain as a great and illuminating truth struck home. Idly my eyes had been focussed for some moments upon the word "covercharge," and I was about to turn to something else when an inward urging prompted me to examine it more closely. Then suddenly I made a discovery which should rank high among the findings of the linguistic historians, and which, for some unaccountable reason, has hitherto escaped them.

It is well known to students of philology that certain words which are frank, forthright and perhaps a bit vulgar, tend, in polite society, to evolve into slightly different but delicate forms which, while retaining roughly the basic meaning of the original, no longer offend the

finer sensibilities. Thus, for example, many oaths have become emasculated. "Damn" is often "darn," "hell" gives way to "heck," "God" to "Gosh," "Good God" to "Good Gracious." Some ladies speak of the limbs of a piano instead of the legs, and refer to a bull as a gentleman cow. As for the word "covercharge," I would like to know what thoughtful night-club proprietor discovered this euphemistic anodyne. For those whose fragile natures impel them to squirm from the truth this spelling may be helpful, but I prefer to face the facts, leave the first letter out, and call my spade a bloody shovel.

\* \* \*

It is very difficult to clean up the morals of a city the size of New York. Evidently there exists a perpetual equilibrium of vice and general low-mindedness which no amount of pressure will permanently displace in the desired direction. When an organized, concerted attack is made upon one type of misbehavior, the surveillance over other types relaxes considerably, with the result that these flourish. After a time the cold eye of authority turns upon the latter, and the former come to life again. Some time ago there was a great outcry here against the burlesque houses, and they were effectively cleaned up. For the past six months there has been an extended and effective attack upon the vice racket, and today the burlesque houses in the Times Square section are almost as numerous as the motion picture theatres.

One evening recently I went to Minsky's Republic Theatre and found the show dirtier, and consequently duller, than ever before. Of course other factors play a part in bringing about this situation. Clever politicians keep the public satisfied with the administration in power by turning the spotlight of investigation continually from one field to another, while the sum total of receipts remains fairly constant. Another factor which regulates these swings is, of course (to use the above example once more) evident when we consider that as soon as organized vice again becomes general in the city, the burlesque shows will lose a lot of their trade by a natural process, since, for many of their customers, mass mental titillation will no longer be an urgent need.

\* \* \*

The dancing on the Central Park Mall has begun again. Every Tuesday and Thursday evening several thousand couples gather here to dance under the stars to the music of a W.P.A. orchestra. Out-of-towners who think they know New York by night because they have spent a great deal of time and money in the Morocco, the Stork Club and the Rainbow Room, and who carry away with them an impression of high-toned and expensive gaiety as the predominant mood of local night-life, would do well to see how the other ninety-nine per cent of our young people amuse themselves. Everybody has a good time, but while the dancing is free, there are many rules which see that propriety is maintained. There must be no cutting-in (a measure designed to prevent fighting among the boys), no girls may dance together, and no smoking is allowed on the space provided for dancing. Men may not dance in their shirt-sleeves, the dancers must keep moving, and, of course, improper dancing is taboo. I went expecting to see the Lindy Hop, the Montclair Roll and similar terpsichorean gyrations, but these, too, are prohibited. I was told that there is a comparable arrange-

ment for the colored folk up in Harlem, also with a W.P.A. orchestra, and that they are allowed to swing it all they like, but I had no time to make the trip that evening.

\* \* \*

The climate hereabouts has changed abruptly from very cold and damp to very hot and humid. In the wintertime those New Yorkers who are able to do so go where it is warmer, and in the summer they go where it is cooler. I find it difficult to understand why the Indians who inhabited this island before the coming of white men did not become disgusted with the weather and go elsewhere. The hunting and fishing must surely have been as good in more equable climates. The fierce and warlike Iroquois probably got that way by fighting off the Manhattan Indians in the summer, and the equally violent Seminoles no doubt acquired their skill in battle through being obliged to repel the Manhattanites every winter. Perhaps the California tribes were so peace-loving because none of the New York Indians had heard about the climate in those days. It is no wonder that the natives were glad to sell this island for a few bottles of whiskey.

\* \* \*

The other day while driving in Pennsylvania from Pottsville toward Reading I was forced to come to a sudden stop along with a line of cars ahead of me. A Reverend from Pottsville who was following close behind, crashed into the rear end of my car, thereby smashing his radiator and joining the two machines together in such a way that it took us an hour or so to separate them. Since his car had to be towed to a garage I offered him a lift to town and we had a pleasant talk about books, people and the way of life of the Pennsylvania Dutch. These folk, whose forebears were hardy, frugal pioneers, appear nowadays to be living a more gentle life. One of them, a carpenter, was commissioned by our friend to make some vitally necessary repairs on the roof of the rectory. Shortly after the work had begun he disappeared, and was only to be found with the greatest difficulty. He had gone fishing, and explained that the weather had suddenly become just right for it.

Something else we learned was that Pottsville, the Gibbville of John O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra*, talked of nothing but this book for months. Several of the less distinguished characters of the town, who did not fancy the author's portraits of them, began to hoard a long grudge against the day of his return to the scenes of his early manhood. One day early this year Mr. O'Hara did go back to Pottsville, and, according to our informant, was much chagrined at the quality of his reception. In fact, it appears that after he had been in town for only a short time he abruptly changed his plans and returned to New York. Autographing books and attending literary teas are not the only burdens of authorship. As I left my interesting companion he said he hoped that he would bump into me again some time, and it was, of course only after he had irretrievably gone that I thought of countering this thrust by hoping that he would never again take advantage of me behind my back.

\* \* \*

Archaeologists should be interested in paying a visit to Staten Island, for there, on a small plot of ground at

Hylan Boulevard near Midland Beach, may be seen the last survival of an age that is long since dead. It is a perfect specimen of the Tom Thumb Golf Course of the period when this creature had attained its highest development. It is noteworthy that while some ancient forms of life became extinct because they were too large and not complex enough to survive, this particular species, as even a casual survey of its remains will reveal, was on the contrary doomed to extinction because it was altogether too small and too complex. Fundamentalists should defy Evolutionists to explain away this paradox.

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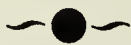
*Sons O' Guns* is an interesting experiment, for if it is a success it will prove that studios are foolish in buying the rights to dramas, short stories and novels and going to the expense of having these adapted for the screen, and are even more misguided in their attempt to encourage the development of original stories. The producers of this picture went no further for their material, it would appear, than an old attic in which reposed such masterpieces as *Through Arkansas on a Mule*, *Irish Wit and Humore*, *Hobo Jokes of 1912*, and the like. Having found these admirable sources of witticisms to which the average movie fan, being young, would never have been subjected before, they proceeded to suit the action of the piece to the words of the jokes, not realizing, perhaps, that a good synonym for "hobo" is "bum." Joe E. Brown has an exceptionally large mouth, but this isolated fact is not of itself enough to produce an hilarious evening at the cinema.

\* \* \*

Times Square is no longer the same. What with the omnipresent Wrigley aquarium, several new and modern buildings, and the modernized front of the Astor Hotel, visitors who have been away will be surprised pleasantly when they see the old triangle again. Their greatest surprise and, perhaps, their most amusement, will be aroused by the sight of the entrance to the subway on 42nd Street west of Broadway. Not to be surpassed by all this modernization in the neighborhood, the subway people have constructed a street-level façade, the clean rectangular line of which is reminiscent of J. J. P. Oud's Café de Unie in Rotterdam. Samuel Rosoff has brought Neo-Plasticism to the masses; it is a poetic introduction to the sordid caverns below.

\* \* \*

For those readers who may still wish to know the solution to the enigma concerning leaves on trees which was posed here in the issue of June 20, the answer follows: Ask your friend, who claims that he can state instantly the number of leaves on any tree, and who challenges you to prove that he cannot do so, to tell the number of leaves on a nearby tree. He will say, for instance, that this particular tree has five thousand, two hundred and fifteen leaves. In order to expose him as a colossal mountebank you have now only to ask him to go away somewhere for a few moments, and during his absence you remove any given number of leaves from the tree. Let us say, for example, that you have taken off seven leaves. Now, on his return, you ask your friend again to show his prowess by stating the number of leaves on the same tree. If he says five thousand, two hundred and eight I will resign as puzzle editor of the SPECTATOR.



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*Hollywood*

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# S P E C T A T O R

Eleventh Year

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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SWING TIME, YOURS FOR THE ASKING, I'D GIVE MY LIFE, WALKING ON AIR, THE GENTLEMAN FROM LOUISIANA, CAIN AND MABEL, HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD, STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER, THE TEXAS RANGERS, KING OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED, DON'T TURN 'EM LOOSE, DRAEGERMAN COURAGE.



From the

# Editor's Easy Chair



**Q**UOTING Leopold Stokowski, famed music master, in an interview with Edwin Schallert, *Los Angeles Times*: "One must come to Hollywood with a free mind. One must recognize pictures as utterly different from any other form both artistically and mechanically. They are entirely distinct from the concert, the stage and the radio. All past beliefs and traditions must be forgotten. One starts a completely new life here. Only on assuming this attitude, and recognizing that he is faced with entirely new questions and issues, can a person have the proper approach to pictures. It is a matter of learning right from the primary grade on." This eminent master of one of the articulate arts puts into words only what the SPECTATOR has been preaching for more than ten years. If the SPECTATOR had been his sole guide, he could not have expressed its views more clearly, as all those who have read it regularly know. But if Stokowski is going to have a career in pictures, I hope he is a patient man. Of course, what he says about the screen is true. Any person who takes an interest in the art knows it is "utterly different from any other form, both artistically and mechanically," but what Stokowski will find himself up against is the fact that those who dominate picture production here do not take an intelligent interest in the art. They will laugh at his views. To them there is no such thing as an art of the screen, motion pictures being merely photographs of things done in front of a camera as for centuries they have been done behind the footlights of the theatre. They will admit making pictures requires genius, and unblushingly will acknowledge they are the geniuses who make them, but beyond that will be a solid wall of ignorance of the art in which Hollywood thinks it is expressing itself.

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**B**UT if Stokowski is a stout fellow and can stick it out, he may live to see the day when some of his dreams will come true. It is a fine thing that the poor, emaciated and palsied thing that used to resemble screen art, still reveals sufficient possibilities to attract the attention of such a man and make him enthusiastic for its future. He comes to Hollywood with the firm conviction that the screen is a great art, perhaps even agreeing with those who believe it is the greatest of all arts. There may be a hint of his own desire to figure in picture production when he goes on to say: "I believe that opera, which can be presented with a great reality and conviction, will prove suitable to the motion-picture medium. I believe that there are works which have deep cosmic significance which may in time be produced. What finer, for instance, than the

*Nibelungen Lied*, which has such power and meaning in showing that greed for gold brings with it a curse. Perhaps *Parsifal* would be an ideal subject. Possibly some other Wagnerian works." The screen already has demonstrated its ability to do plays and opera greater justice than the stage can do them, but if we are to regard the screen as a business, as it must be regarded if it is to continue to exist, I think it would be wiser for it to stick to its own field than to explore the field of art solely for art's sake. Its strength as entertainment is the simplicity of its expression. Occasionally ambitious spectacles and mammoth productions are all right, but the screen will get farther commercially if it applies the principles of its art form to the production of simple stories with human appeal. When it learns how to make the smaller pictures, there will be time enough for it to attempt the massive classics. But I doubt if grand opera ever will pay its way as screen entertainment.

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**U**NIVERSAL entertainment is the screen's field. All human beings have one thing in common—the power to feel. A picture which appeals to our emotions through the elemental device of pictures, can give universal satisfaction. One which appeals to our intellects can give satisfaction only to those whose intellectual capacity is not outdistanced by what is offered it. The whole world can enjoy a simple story told by the camera. If Einstein made a picture, possibly not more than a dozen people in the world would enjoy it. The farther the screen gets away from its simplest method of expression, the more it reduces its audience. That is my quarrel with the film industry for going over wholly to the method of telling stories in dialogue, instead of using the microphone to record only essential speeches. It has made its entertainment intellectual instead of emotional, as it was when pictures were silent. It has banished children from its picture houses and further reduced its audience by eliminating those who formerly derived satisfaction from the intellectual rest motion pictures offered them. The more it branches out along the ambitious lines Stokowski suggests,

## THIS IS THE LAST

With its next issue the Spectator will resume its standard size—perhaps even add several pages to recompense readers for the brevity of the issues during July and August. Advertisers who expected to see their announcements in this Spectator will find them in the next.

the farther will it get away from the audience it has left. Metro's superb *Romeo and Juliet* is a production to which all Hollywood can point with justifiable pride as a notable example of the artistic heights the screen can attain. Metro is to be commended if its object in making it was to serve screen art, but its business judgment is to be questioned if its impelling motive was the material welfare of its stockholders.

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**WRITES** Don Carle Gillette in *Film Daily*: "It is just as hard as ever to figure out and keep track of public fancy." There is no reason why picture producers should give a thought to the problem. All their thought should be expended on their product. All the public ever has asked for is good screen entertainment, and if producers confine their efforts solely to making their pictures entertaining, they will have no cause for worry about the public's reaction to what is offered. Nothing is sillier than the film industry's belief in "cycles" of public taste. Because a picture dealing with, say, aviation, happens to be outstanding success, Hollywood straightway convinces itself the public suddenly has developed a taste for aviation pictures and will support everyone with an airplane in it, no matter what a poor thing it is as entertainment. That is how "cycles" are born. No picture ever was made successful by its theme, just as no painting ever was made great by the subject the artist painted. The success of any object of art depends upon the degree of perfection attained in its execution. Good screen art always will mean big screen audiences.

\* \* \*

**LUISE RAINER** in sixteen words says more about screen acting than I have managed to say in years of writing about it, and what she says is exactly what I have been trying to say. My contention is that the screen is not an acting art, that all it requires from its players is complete absorption in their roles until they become the characters they play. If the absorption be complete, the player's performance is not acting. It is a perfect performance, as we use the word, because the player does only what the character would do. Remembering any rules taught him by a dramatic coach, reading lines the way his elocution teacher taught him, making an effort to impress an audience, would serve only to lessen the sincerity of his characterization. What I have failed to do was to tell an aspirant for an acting career how to go about equipping himself for it. That is where Miss Rainer comes in. In *Good Earth* she plays an inarticulate Chinese woman, a drab, patient wife of few words. She tells a *Los Angeles Times* interviewer how she plays it: "I must think what I feel so hard that the audience will think the same thing." There you have all anyone need know about screen acting. The eyes and the camera will do the rest.

\* \* \*

**WHEN** Mervyn LeRoy announced his intention of becoming an independent producer, all the major organizations made overtures to him. His final decision to line up with Warners was not influenced by the fact of his having married into the family. He married only one of the Warners girls, not the whole organization, and it is no secret that the Warner men had a devil of a time with him before he finally was captured. Meeting the con-

cessions other producers were willing to grant Mervyn was no easy job. And when he finally made his decision he gave the best possible reason for tying up with Warners: "I was influenced greatly by the fact that Warner Brothers always have been pioneers in making motion pictures that were different," and he cites *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Green Pastures*, *Adverse*, *Pasteur* and others to illustrate what he meant. The extraordinary progress of Warners since Jack Warner and Hal Wallis have been working together has been due to the fact that apparently they are not afraid to tackle anything. They are today's blazers of new cinematic trails, and other producing organizations are becoming merely imitators. It will not be long now before Hal Wallis is recognized generally as Hollywood's outstanding production executive. He is that now, but Hollywood has not found it out yet. Mervyn LeRoy was wise in aligning himself with an organization that is advancing so rapidly.

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**AMONG** the many publications the postman brings me, none is read with greater interest than *The Era*, London. It has a "Talking Shop" feature, unequalled for wit and wisdom by a similar feature in any other paper I know. If you are aware it has been cold in England all this summer, you will get the point of this remark, as well as an idea of the stability of *The Era*: "Next month *The Era* enters its centenary year. It has seen one hundred summers, with the exception of 1936." Another: "Research work for *The Good Earth* has discovered that jazz was discovered by the Chinese two thousand years ago. Crept in through a chink, so to speak." Occasionally "Talking Shop" contains one put in standard joke form: "Girl guest: 'Who's my partner?' Hostess: 'He's a naval surgeon.' Girl: 'Oh, one of those specialists.'" You'd think the old thing would be more sedate, eh, what? However, if Editor G. A. Atkinson does not cease giving me personal credit for the witticisms. Fred Stein contributes to the SPECTATOR, he is going to put me in bad with my New York Spectacle man.

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**ANY** screen player who thinks he is not getting enough attention from autograph seekers at gatherings of film people, might start here a new occupation which is affording a livelihood to some people in Paris. Over there one can hire a crowd at five francs a head to pester him for his autograph. For the five francs the pests provide their own autograph books.

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**WHILE** Hollywood's sidewalks are cluttered with actors, writers and directors who served the film industry well when pictures were silent, and now never see inside a studio, anyone who has done even a mediocre job for the stage can find his way onto a studio payroll, even though it is the stage influence which has made exhibitors resort to dual bills and give-aways in an effort to attract audiences. A couple of weeks ago a Los Angeles theatre even served breakfast with an early showing of a feature picture. In order to bring the film industry back to the business it was in when it first became prosperous, it might be a good idea to round up all the writers of successful silent scripts and have them prepare screen plays as if they were to be shot in silence. Essential speeches then could be written for reproduction in the form of

audible dialogue. In this way we would be provided with motion pictures again and no longer would it be necessary to hand a piece of toast and a cup of coffee to every customer who handed the doorman a ticket of admission to a picture house.

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**T**HE public is not responding to the Carthay Circle showing of *Anthony Adverse* as enthusiastically as it did to the showing of *The Great Ziegfeld*, and the indications are that the run of the Warner picture will not approach in duration that of the Metro spectacle. *Anthony Adverse* has what might be termed an interesting weakness—the fact that the leading character is purely a negative one. Both in the book and on the screen the hero of the story motivates nothing. He is solely a creature of circumstances, all his actions being dictated by others. His trip to Havana is not of his own volition, and conditions he finds there make it necessary for him to proceed to Africa. Later, his visit to Paris is due to the urging of his friend, as is also his departure for Louisiana, which closes the story. As you review the picture in retrospect you can not point to one action that is due to his own initiative. He does not dominate the story; he is dominated by it. In the book this was not so noticeable, as the author's literary style was sufficiently entertaining to keep the reader's interest alive, but on the screen the continued presence of scenes of a hero whose actions are controlled by circumstances over which he exercises no control, is such a departure from the standard dominant hero, that the picture leaves us with a feeling that something is lacking, although just what it is may not occur to us while we are viewing it. The deficiency, however, must have some effect in limiting the duration of the picture's run in such a spot as the Carthay Circle which keeps an attraction until its drawing power is exhausted.

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**T**HE extreme care studios exercise to have every detail in every scene absolutely correct is exemplified in the *Tarzan* picture now under way at Metro. The story presents Tarzan and his mate some years after the closing of the last picture, which showed Maureen O'Sullivan electing to remain in the jungle with the primitive young man with whom she had fallen in love, Johnnie Weismuller playing the young man. For the new picture it was necessary to show the two living in some sort of home. Weismuller's only tools are a saw and a knife. He knows nothing of modern ways of living, caves being the only shelter he had sought from birth. Maureen brings to the jungle civilized ideas and experience with modern comforts and conveniences, but lacks mechanical knowledge. The two, however, set about building and furnishing a home. That is part of the story. Behind the story is Elmer Sheeley, of the art department. His duty was to see that every detail of the construction shown on the screen could be fashioned with a saw and a knife. It was an interesting problem. With every modern mechanical tool at the command of his workmen, all trace of the use of any of them had to be hidden from the camera. Inside the house you will see a sink with running water, a revolving fan, and all sorts of gadgets to make life easier, but each looks as if it had been made with a saw and a knife. Sheeley formerly was with Uni-

versal. I saw him on that lot one day, displaying physical evidence of concentration on some perplexing problem. I asked him what was bothering him. "A director is clamoring for a whirlpool and a jar of marmalade," he explained, "and I don't think there's any marmalade on the whole blooming lot."

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**W**ARNERS do big things boldly and handsomely, but overlook some little things which might become big. In Marie Wilson they have a young woman with a distinctive personality, unquestioned ability and a great yearning to get somewhere on the screen. Warners so far have been able to see her only as suitable for silly-girl parts and she is in danger of becoming typed in them. She should be developed for character parts, for roles that would make us cry for her, not laugh at her. With proper handling I am confident she could become a really brilliant actress. She has registered a hint of greatness even in the silly parts she has played recently.

\* \* \*

**P**ETE SMITH has gone highbrow. He has turned out a dramatic feature, as tense a piece of drama as I have seen in a long time. It spans a three-year period, telling a complete story of the doings within that time of a little girl and her dog. It is feature-length in story content, but Pete has compressed it within eight hundred feet, the usual length of one of his little masterpieces. It is the finest short subject of its kind that I have seen, and opens a vista of a new Pete Smith rising to great heights as producer of dramatic gems. Jacques Tourneur directed the story in a manner that does him credit. The whole thing is rather an extraordinary demonstration of how much dramatic entertainment can be packed into little footage when picture brains function at their peak. For some years Pete has been thinking in terms of eight-hundred-foot subjects, and I am ready to believe he could have confined *The Great Ziegfeld* to that footage if he really put his mind to it. The name of his dramatic short is *The Killer Dog*, and I advise you to look for it. I saw two other of Pete's little ones, *Behind the Headlines*, directed by Edward Kahn, and *Racing Canines*, directed by David Miller. The former is an intensely interesting recital of what happens to a newspaper story from the moment of its happening until it appears on the street in printed form. It is fundamentally sound entertainment, because, while newspapers are about the commonest things we have, few people know anything about their process of manufacture. The title of *Racing Canines* explains its nature. With his usual sparkling wit Pete takes us to the dog races and shows us some remarkable examples of canine speed and agility. Slow-motion shots of leaping greyhounds are the last word in graceful rhythm. Pete really is doing great work. He started with an idea and now is fathering the most popular series of short subjects.

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**W**ITH the next seven shirts to come back from the hand laundry I will have my first million pins.

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**W**HEN I think of the billions being spent in Washington and contemplate the cheapness of the string the postoffice uses to tie the bundles of mail the postman brings us, I get furious.



# Some Late Previews

## *Fred Astaire Delights*

SWING TIME, R. K. O. Pandro S. Berman production. Directed by George Stevens; music by Jerome Kern; lyrics by Dorothy Fields; screen play by Howard Lindsay and Allan Scott; from a story by Erwin Gelsey; musical director Nathaniel Shilkret; art director Van Nest Polglase, associate Carroll Clark; "silver sandals" set and "bojangles" costumes by John Harkrider; photographed by David Abel, A. S. C.; photographic effects by Vernon Walker, A. S. C.; Set Dressing by Darrell Silvera; dance director Hermes Pan; Gowns by Bernard Newman; recorded by Hugh McDowell, Jr.; sound cutter George Marsh; edited by Henry Berman; assistant director Argyle Nelson. Cast: Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Victor Moore, Helen Broderick, Eric Blore, Betty Furness, Georges Metaxa. Running time, 100 mins.

FRED ASTAIRE'S pleasing personality, his rhythmic grace as a dancer, charm and intelligence as an actor and proficiency as a singer make *Swing Time* a highly entertaining picture. He is teamed again with Ginger Rogers, who continues to make progress, but still has some distance to go before her contribution to one of their joint appearances measures up to that of her partner. I confess that when the two dance I keep my eyes on Astaire, but nevertheless I got the impression this time that Ginger was dancing better than ever. Her chief failing still is her inability to make full use of her hands. A great deal of the charm of the dancing of Jessie Matthews is the artistic manner in which she brings her hands into play. From her hips down, Ginger displays grace and rhythm, but she still is somewhat awkward from there up.

However, there is one thing about Ginger which I admire greatly—she is ambitious, determined, and works like a Trojan to acquire what was not born in her. When we consider that in her appearances with Astaire she is pitted against perhaps the world's greatest dancer and by no means shames the combination, we must praise her for what she has done and not criticize her too sharply for what still is lacking. I do not know any girl who can both act and dance up to Astaire's dual standard, which suggests the thought that RKO might get two girls to do the chores. I see no reason why Astaire always should have to love the girl he dances with.

George Stevens was given a mass of material to work with—two established stars, a capable cast, gorgeous scenic effects and big ensembles, and succeeds admirably in pleasantly befuddling our senses until we are indifferent to the weaknesses of the story. Pan Berman no doubt would get in bad with the other fellows who produce musicals if he supplied one of his with a coherent story having some appeal to an intelligent audience, but I think he should have a go at it. The innovation might provoke the box-office into hearty response. I know of no law that would be broken if a picture like *Swing Time* were made to appeal to the intellect as well as to the eye.

But the eye appeal of *Swing Time* is quite sufficient to make it worth your while. In Fred Astaire you will see an extraordinary artist brilliantly revealing his versatility. And there are Helen Broderick and Victor Moore in comedy roles which will delight you. Georges

Metaxa—I believe it is his screen debut—contributes a worthy performance, and Betty Furness adds a charming feminine note.

Jerome Kern has provided the production with some notable music which Nathaniel Shilkret brings to the screen in a manner that does full justice to the score. Shilkret is a valuable addition to the music masters whom the screen is attracting. Van Polglase and Carroll Clark provided magnificent settings for some of the sequences and David Abel's expert photography brings out all their pictorial values. Hermes Pan, dance director, and Bernard Newman, designer of the gowns, also deserve praise for the artistic quality of their contributions.

## *King Vidor's Good One*

THE TEXAS RANGERS, Paramount release of King Vidor production. Directed by King Vidor; from story by King Vidor and Elizabeth Hill; screen play by Louis Stevens; art directors, Hans Dreier and Bernard Herzbrun; photographed by Edward Cronjager; musical direction by Boris Morros; songs by Phil Boutelje, Jack Scholl and Sam Coslow; assistant director, Russell Mathews. Cast: Fred MacMurray, Jack Oakie, Jean Parker, Lloyd Nolan, Edward Ellis, Bennie Bartlett, Frank Shannon, Frank Cordell, Richard Carle, Jed Prouty, Fred Kohler, George Hayes, Running time, 90 mins.

KING VIDOR apparently refuses to accept the general Hollywood view that the screen went stage when it went talkie. In this first picture to come from him in a long time, he uses the camera as his principal story-telling medium, brushing it across vast stretches of Texas scenery to secure for us some beautiful views made glorious by the extraordinary photography of Edward Cronjager, whose skill transforms a sagebrush vista into an exquisite work of pictorial art. The camera, too, records graphically the physical drama of the establishment of law and order in the Lone Star state. In fact, King comes mighty close to giving us a motion picture.

The story of *Texas Rangers* differs from most of the documentary sort in that the characters it presents are second in importance to the history it relates. In *San Francisco* the earthquake has story interest to the extent it affects the Mary Blake-Blackie romance. It is but an incident in a human drama. *Texas Rangers* is an historical drama, and the characters are of importance only to the extent they contribute to the forward progress of the history. But it is none the less a stirring recital, packed with drama and enlivened with comedy touches possessing the virtue of having a legitimate place in the story.

King Vidor is entitled to a threefold credit, as producer, author and director. It is his first production for Paramount on his new contract. His direction is flawless. He builds admirably to his dramatic punches, yet shows restraint and reveals no visible effort to achieve results. In the midst of all the strife and movement of masses of whites and Indians, he injects one of the tenderest and sweetest love scenes ever shown on the screen. He displays also a rich sense of comedy values. His handling of his cast is masterly.

Jack Oakie never before gave such a performance, nor has he even hinted at his ability to rise to the heights he achieves under Vidor's direction. He garners many laughs, but in essence his characterization is a serious

one. He, Fred MacMurray and Lloyd Nolan are introduced first as bandits. Oakie and MacMurray ultimately join the Rangers and reform, Nolan remaining the bandit until MacMurray's bullets put an end to his career. Both MacMurray and Nolan give the best performances yet to their credit. Nolan, as the implacable preyer on society, is brilliant throughout.

Edward Ellis is another member of the cast who distinguishes himself. Jean Parker has little to do, but adds a pleasant feminine touch. There are many other characters, rugged, strong men of the plains, who sustain the excellence of the acting standard set by the leads.

The closing sequence is highly dramatic and has symbolic significance. The Law, in the person of one man, MacMurray, sets out to end Lawlessness, typified also by one man, Nolan, the two being former partners in the commission of many crimes. Each hesitates to shoot the other, but Law's representative is relentless and finally his gun barks out the inevitable end.

Boris Morros contributes a stirring musical background to many scenes which otherwise would be silent. The only weakness of such spasmodic treatment is that we become aware of the accompaniment at the expense of the story value of the scenes. But I suppose we should be content with even scattered bits of music while awaiting the day when producers become acquainted sufficiently with the fundamental demands of their medium to realize that every picture should have a continuous score. It seems queer to me that their picture reasoning goes only as far as supplying some scenes with music, yet does not go far enough to make them see the reason why all scenes should have it.

### *Informative and Dramatic*

**DRAEGERMAN COURAGE**, Warners release of First National production. Supervised by Bryan Foy; directed by Louis King; original story and screen play by Anthony Coldeway; photographed by Gilbert Warrenton. Cast: Jean Muir, Barton MacLane, Henry O'Neill, Robert Barrat, Addison Richards, Helen MacKellar, Gordon Oliver, Joseph Crehan, Pricilla Lyon, Walter Miller, Herbert Heywood, Ben Hendricks. Running time; 60 minutes.

**A** FACTUAL film, a drama with a pinch of romance, a large measure of human feeling and an interesting setting—all compounded expertly by Director Louis King, under the supervision of Producer Bryan Foy and the trademark of Warner Brothers. I am not an authority on film statistics, but it appears to me that Bryan Foy turns out more of these class B pictures than any other associate producer in the business. It is quite a knack, this working with small budgets and restricted shooting schedules and still getting good entertainment which reveals no scars of economy.

Certainly *Draegerman Courage* is good entertainment, much better than that provided by the majority of pictures costing many times as much. Any audience in any house would find it engrossing. It derives its strength from the fact that it is primarily a physical story which the camera relates. It is a screen recreation of the Nova Scotia mine cave-in which imprisoned three men, one of whom died, the other two being rescued after ten days of heroic struggle by the mine crew. Even though we knew in advance the outcome by virtue of the tragedy being

comparatively recent news, we follow with mounting interest the camera's record of the progress of the rescue work, and breathe freely again only when the rescue is effected successfully.

And the picture has educational value. It takes us underground and shows how a mine crew works. Into the narrative Anthony Coldeway cleverly has woven an incidental romance and a human interest element with a lovable country doctor as its central character. It is expert writing. Louis King's direction is beyond criticism, with equal assurance developing both the physical and emotional phases of the story.

Barton MacLane is outstanding in a sympathetic role, and Henry O'Neill, as the doctor, gives one of those fine, human characterizations we have learned to expect from him. Robert Barratt and Addison Richards are others who stand out. Jean Muir, whom I have not seen often enough of late, contributes an appealing performance, and Helen MacKellar deserves praise for her work as the doctor's wife.

### *Westerns and Stupidity*

**KING OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED**, 20th-Fox. release of Sol Lesser production. Directed by Howard Bretherton from Story by Zane Grey; screen play by Earl Snell; photographed by Harry Newman; art director, Lewis J. Rachmil; film editor, Robert Crandall. Cast: Robert Kent, Rosalind Keith, Alan Dinehart, Frank McGlynn, Sr., Arthur Loft, Grady Sutton, Jack Luden, Artie Ortego. Running time; 70 minutes.

**D**ID you ever give thought to the reason for the popularity of Western pictures? They were the film industry's first consistent box-office attractions, and to-day there are communities scattered all over the country where nothing else is shown. It is not the story material that makes them popular, as all of them use the same one. It is neither the acting nor the direction that keeps them alive, as most of those being turned out now are rather dreadful affairs when viewed from the standpoint of cinematic possibilities. What then?

It is their elemental appeal that gives Westerns their box-office value. We derive entertainment from every repetition of the standard story because what we know is going to happen is what we want to happen; and we glory in the great stretches of open country the pictures show us because they bring to us what all of us have a desire to go to. There was a time in the history of the film industry when its Wise Men decided Westerns were dead. The *SPECTATOR* laughed at the Wise Men and assured them that all of them would be making them again. But their producers are not displaying wisdom in making such poor Westerns.

*King of the Royal Mounted* contains all the ingredients that make for success, glorious scenery, a capable cast, and the usual story, but Howard Bretherton's direction makes a poor thing of it. The dialogue is just lines spoken without any regard for the significance of scenes. Alan Dinehart stands in the archway connecting the lobby and dining room of a small hotel, and in a matter-of-fact, full voice tells Rosalind Keith to remember the name she is to use to hide her real identity, and that she is to pose as merely his friend on a vacation jaunt. There are people

in the lobby and the dining room, all of whom could hear every word spoken. Later, there are several scenes between Dinehart and some unexplained character who is his fellow-crook, the two fairly yelling their lines without thought for eavesdroppers. It is direction at the peak of its stupidity and which robs the picture of all conviction. Intelligent direction was all it needed to make it entertaining.

Robert Kent and Miss Keith are the only natural people in the cast. I never saw either of them before, but each shows promise. Harry Newman provides some excellent photography.

### *Boulevard is Starred*

**HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD**, a Paramount picture. Producer, A. M. Botsford; supervisor, Edward F. Cline; director, Robert Florey; assistant director, Joseph Lefert; based on a story by Faith Thomas; screen play, Marguerite Roberts; sound, W. H. Oberst; film editor, William Shea; art directors, Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; photographer, Karl Struss, A.S.C.; music, Hollywood Boulevard Rhapsody, written by Boris Morros. Cast: John Halliday, Marsha Hunt, Robert Cummings, C. Henry Gordon, Esther Ralston, Esther Dale, Frieda Inescort, Albert Conti, Thomas Jackson, Oscar Apfel, Purnell Pratt, Hyman Fink, Irving Bacon, Richard, Powell, Rita La Roy.

QUITE a long time ago the SPECTATOR expressed the opinion that Robert Florey was one of the best directors in Hollywood. At that time I did not know him personally, never had seen him, but there was something in his work that made me confident he would do big things on the screen. He is on the Paramount lot now making important pictures out of what are intended to be unimportant class B ones. *Hollywood Boulevard* is an expert piece of direction, away above what we find in ninety per cent of the big pictures made by the big directors. Some day Paramount is going to discover Florey, give him not more than three pictures to do in a year, and make a whole lot of money out of him.

*Hollywood Boulevard* is good enough to be shown anywhere. It is interesting from the start of the first introductory title. Hollywood is planted in quick shots, then a comprehensive impression of the film capital is given, then back to a boulevard traffic signal as it changes to "Go," and the story begins. At the end, there is a return to the signal as it changes to "Stop," and the story is over.

It is a story of Hollywood heartaches, of the cruelty of Hollywood's neglect of players who have made it famous, and the cruelty of the sensational fan magazines which present as facts their fictional conception of the private lives of screen players. It would do Hollywood a world of good if the whole world saw the picture. There is no satire, no extravagance, in the telling of the story, nothing but a plain recital of things which could happen, admirably acted and admirably directed. It has another of those complete and satisfying productions we have grown accustomed to expect from A. M. Botsford, photographed with the rare artistic skill that characterizes all the camera work of Karl Struss.

It is a picture with a "lest we forget" complex. Part of the cast is given above. Here are others who will awaken pleasant cinematic memories: Francis X. Bushman, Maurice Costello, Betty Compson, Mae Marsh,

Charles Ray, Roy d'Arcy, Creighton Hale, Ruth Clifford, Edmund Burns, Mabel Forrest, Herbert Rawlinson, Jane Novak, Bryant Washburn, William Desmond, Jack Mulhall, Frank Mayo, Jack Mower, Charles Morton, Harry Myers, Tom Kennedy, Pat O'Malley.

John Halliday gives us a striking characterization of a once great star living pathetically on memories of his greatness, selling his memoirs to a fan magazine which transforms them into the "Love Lives of John Blakeford," which brings grief to Mae Marsh, the wife from whom he is separated, and Marsha Hunt, the daughter he rarely has seen. Marsha shares a charming romance with Robert Cummings, a youth whose first appearance on the screen prompted me to predict for him a successful screen career. In this picture he comes through with a fine performance. But I resent one of his lines.

"You've a funny nose, but it's cute," Robert says to Marsha. I will have him know I am the original discoverer of Marsha's nose. I extolled it in these pages, and warned all plastic surgeons to leave it alone. I love the way it turns up. It is just one item in the charm Marsha radiates. She is one of those nice young things with personalities and brains whom the screen can use to its advantage. Her performance in *Hollywood Boulevard* is another step toward the great popularity that soon will be hers.

Esther Ralston, beautiful as ever, enacts a brief part so well that it makes one wonder why producers persist in overlooking her. Albert Conti, another who served silent pictures faithfully, also commands attention in a small role, as does Oscar Apfel, who is not seen often enough. Tom Jackson does his detective again in his usual impressive manner.

Among the leads, C. Henry Gordon gives one of those smooth and compelling performances that years ago stamped him as one of the finest actors in pictures. Frieda Inescort again proves her worth, and Esther Dale also scores, even though her role is a negative one.

Marguerite Roberts wrote a clever screen play based on a story by Faith Thomas. Boris Morros is to be commended for the music he contributed to the picture and William Shea for a competent example of film editing.

Do not let the fact of its appearance on some double bill keep you away from *Hollywood Boulevard*. Single bill houses rarely show a better one.

### *Marion is Presented*

**CAIN AND MABLE**, Warners release of Cosmopolitan production. Co-stars Marion Davies and Clark Gable; directed by Lloyd Bacon; screen play by Laird Doyle; story by H. C. Witwer; production numbers staged by Bobby Connolly; music and lyrics by Harry Warren and Al Dubin; photographed by George Barnes; art director, Robert Haas; assistant director, Dick Mayberry; musical direction, Leo F. Forbstein; orchestral arrangements, Ray Heindorf. Supporting cast: Allen Jenkins, Roscoe Karns, Walter Catlett, David Carlyle, Hobart Cavanaugh, Ruth Donnelly, Pert Kelton, William Collier, Sr., Sammy White, E. E. Clive, Allen Pomeroy, Robert Middlemass, Joseph Crehan, Eily Malyon. Running time, 89 mins.

WRITING a screen play for a Marion Davies picture presents the interesting problem of keeping the acting demands of her role within the somewhat limited range of her acting ability. The problem was solved in the case of *Cain and Mabel* by throwing the story to the secondary characters, using Marion princi-

pally for decorative purposes and Clark Gable merely as something for her to quarrel with. The result of this sidestepping technique and Lloyd Bacon's meritorious direction is that we have three outstanding performances which in themselves make the picture worth seeing if you can not find anything better to do. Walter Catlett, Roscoe Karns and Allen Jenkins supply the three performances. Willie Collier and Ruth Donnelly also help greatly.

Catlett is the motivating force, as it is his career as a play producer that is affected by the Marion-Gable romance. He and Karns just about run away with the picture. The story is a silly sort of thing, but Catlett and Karns keep it moving sufficiently to sustain our interest. It glides into a theatre with a quarter-acre auditorium and an eight-acre stage upon which is presented one of the most beautiful spectacles the screen has to its credit. I have no idea what the spectacle meant, but I did get as far as believing it was symbolic of something or other. Its loveliness was sufficient excuse for it. George Barnes' superb photography glorified Bobby Connolly's magnificent conception and Robert Haas' extraordinary skill in making it a physical reality.

Gable has little to do except pout and quarrel with Marion. As quarrellers the two are not bad. To Gable's credit is his half of one of the best prizefights I have seen on the screen. There is no suggestion of pulled punches in the spirited affray.

A distressing feature of the production is its senseless parade of close-ups. Every time Marion speaks she is shown in a close-up which eliminates all the rest of the composition of what otherwise could be a pictorially attractive scene. Close-ups are permissible only when it is necessary to emphasize the meaning of a scene by showing the facial expression of the speaker. At other times composition should be retained. Nine-tenths of the close-ups in *Cain and Mabel* are merely absurd intrusions.

### *On the Whole, a Good Job*

**YOURS FOR THE ASKING**, Paramount. Producer, Lewis E. Gensler; director, Alexander Hall; assistant director, James Dugan; from story by William R. Lipman and William H. Wright; screen play, Eve Greene, Harlan Ware and Philip MacDonald; sound, Harry Lindgren; film editor, James Smith; art directors, Hans Dreier and Roland Anderson; photographer, Theodor Sparkuhl, A.S.C.; musical direction, Boris Morros; costumes, Travis Banton; interior decorations, A. E. Freudeman. Cast: George Raft, Dolores Costello Barrymore, Ida Lupino, Reginald Owen, James Gleason, Edgar Kennedy, Lynne Overman, Richard "Skeets" Gallagher, Walter Walker, Robert Gleckler, Richard Powell.

**O**NE queer bit of direction in this one mars what otherwise would have been an excellent job by Al Hall. James Gleason, Edgar Kennedy and Lynne Overman conspire with Ida Lupino to put something over on George Raft. Naturally a conspiracy would be discussed in low, confidential tones. If knowledge of it became general, it would get nowhere. The four are seated around a table in the center of a well filled restaurant. They outline their plans in tones loud enough to be heard by everyone in the place, Kennedy at one time even shouting at the top of his voice, yet not a person at any other table seems to hear a word. The whole scene is made

utterly absurd and meaningless by the manner of its direction.

Except for this one lapse, Hall has made *Yours For Asking* an exceedingly interesting picture. He derives from Raft the best performance of that actor that I have seen. Raft is typed so definitely that he appears to best advantage in elemental characterizations devoid of subtleties and sophisticated polish. It is difficult, therefore, to make convincing his romances with some of the glamorous young women who have played opposite him. In this picture Dolores Costello Barrymore plays opposite him, and so skilfully is the script written and so ably the story developed by Hall's direction, that the romance is a reasonable one which meets with our approval.

Keeping Raft close to his type and giving him to do only such things as he can do well, combine to make his performance believable and the whole picture convincing. The imposing production given it is one of its outstanding features. In its efforts to come back, Paramount apparently is not afraid to spend money. In this instance Lewis Gensler, producer, has made good use of his budget, not only in decor, but also in the selection of the cast.

Dolores takes a long step in her screen come-back. She makes a most charming heroine, playing her part with restraint and understanding. Ida Lupino is a most captivating miss in a role of many facets. She is an excellent little actress.

Reginald Owen develops to the full all the comedy possibilities of his role, that of a down-and-outer devoid of moral scruples. It is a beautifully etched performance. Gleason, Kennedy, and Overman make a trio of comedians whose performances are excellent because of their response to the creditable direction given their scenes. Most directors are too prone to let teams of comedians run wild, the idea behind the direction being that their antics are more important than the story. Hall's idea is different. All the comedy scenes are parts of the story, as all such scenes should be.

### *Intelligent Direction*

**I'D GIVE MY LIFE**, Paramount. Produced by Richard A. Rowland; directed by Edwin L. Marin; assistant director, Vernon Keays; from play, **THE NOOSE**, by H. H. Van Loan and Willard Mack; screen play, George O'Neil; sound, Hugo Grenzbach; film editor, Duncan Mansfield; art director, Ralph Berger; photographer, Ira Morgan, A.S.C.; musical direction, Boris Morros; music and lyrics by Con Conrad and Herb Magidson; additional dialogue by Ben Ryan. Cast: Sir Guy Standing, Frances Drake, Tom Brown, Janet Beecher, Robert Glecker, Helen Lowell, Paul Hurst, Charles C. Wilson, Charles Richman, Tom Jackson, Charles Judels, Robert Elliott, William Burruss, Corbett Morris, Franklin Parker, James Eagles.

**W**HEN you feel the **SPECTATOR** harps too much on one string, please take into consideration the thickness of most of the heads into which we are endeavoring to inject some motion picture knowledge. A gentle hint is of no avail; only constant sledge-hammer blows get any where. For instance: ever since the improvement in the sound camera and the development of greater skill by those who use it, made it possible to record whispers and make them heard by the largest audiences, the **SPECTATOR** has been hammering away at directors in effort to make them see that a motion picture's intimate

appeal depends upon the degree of intimacy with which screen conversations are carried on. When we started the campaign all such conversations were loud debates. Now most of the loud talking has disappeared, but here and there in almost every picture we have some of it.

It remained for Edward L. Marin to give us the first picture in which every line of dialogue is given its real meaning by the tone in which it is uttered. In their love scenes Frances Drake and Tom Brown exchange affectionate expressions almost in whispers, and in the entire picture not a line is spoken above a conversational pitch, the result being that *I'd Give My Life* is one of the most convincing bits of entertainment we have had since the screen was given a tongue. Talking in natural conversational tones curbs the disposition of a player to over-act, consequently the performances are smooth, easy and entirely convincing. Some of the credit for the excellence of the picture goes to Hugo Grenzbach, the sound man, who made every word intelligible to the audience.

The story first appeared in play form as *The Noose*, and Marin admirably develops all its established dramatic possibilities. Tom Brown, around whom the story revolves, gives a really powerful performance, intelligent, restrained and consistent. Frances Drake, completely suppressing her broad A, is an appealing heroine. Outstanding performances also are given by Sir Guy Standing, Janet Beecher, Robert Glecker, Helen Lowell, Paul Hurst and Charles C. Wilson. Tom Jackson, excellent actor whom the screen could use to good advantage in larger parts, makes a brief role particularly sinister.

George O'Neil's screen play is an intelligent adaption of the play. This is the first of the Richard A. Rowland productions I have seen. If he never turns out anything worse than *I'd Give My Life*, he will have a successful career as a Paramount producer. Before he can be completely successful, however, Rowland will have to learn the place of music in screen entertainment. One of the assets of *I'd Give My Life* are frequent silent stretches in which the camera carries the story; one of its liabilities, the fact that there is no musical background for the silent sequences. When the hero starts his march to the gallows there is music, apparently on the theory that such a drab subject could stand a little jazzing up. The absence of music elsewhere throughout the picture helps to create the impression that when the gallows sequence begins, an orchestra is called in to perform the jazzing process.

It is too bad that such an otherwise entertaining picture should share the same fate of many others due to the lack of mental equipment on the part of producers to think clearly in terms of their product. When pictures are made intelligently each will have a full musical score.

## Quillan Rides to Victory

THE GENTLEMAN FROM LOUISIANA, Republic release of Nat Levine production. Supervised by Colbert Clark; directed by Irving Pichel; screen play by Gordon Rigby and Joseph Fields; from original story by Jerry Chodorov and Bert Granet, with additional dialogue by Lee Freeman; photography by Ernest Miller and Jack Marta; sound engineer, Terry Kellum; film editor, Charles Craft; supervising editor, Murray Seldeen; musical supervision by Harry Grey. Cast: Edward Quillan, Charles "Chic" Sale, Charlotte Henry, Marjorie Gateson, John Miljan, Pierre Watkin, Charles Wilson, Ruth Gillette, Holmes Herbert, Matt McHugh, John Kelly, Arthur Wanzer, Snub Pollard, Harrison Greene, Kenneth Lawton, Lowden Adams and Gertrude Hoffman. Running time, 70 mins.

EDDIE QUILLAN would get somewhere if producers would give him more opportunities to display his wares. When I saw the very fine dramatic performance he contributed to *Mutiny on the Bounty*, I thought the young man was on his way, but the first time I have seen him on the screen since that appearance was at the preview showing of *The Gentleman from Louisiana*, in which he played the lead. He is a clever boy, possesses an engaging personality, and has had long training as a screen actor. If he were playing in a New York stage success, motion picture producers would be competing for his services. Being on the ground, available at all times, somehow or other seems to make him less desirable than an importation from the stage. It is a queer business that overlooks people trained for it and gives preference to people trained in another business.

In this Republic picture Quillan has a rather conventional part, which he succeeds in making ingratiatingly interesting. It provides him with an opportunity to display a wide range of emotions. He plays a jockey with a heart big enough to embrace both a racehorse and Charlotte Henry, each of whom displays sufficient charm to make us endorse the young man's taste.

The story is rather obvious; we know what is going to happen, and our attention is kept alive by our interest in watching how the obvious end is to be reached. It is fundamentally sound dramatic construction to let the audience know what is going to happen. It permits it to take an intelligent interest in each step of the progress toward the known end. For that reason I found the little picture entertaining. There are frequent shots of stirring horse races, and the picture is informative by virtue of showing us how Tod Sloan revolutionized race riding by pioneering in the style now used by all jockeys, that of putting the weight directly over the horses' shoulders, instead of in the middle of the back as for centuries had been the rule.

Chic Sale at last has a part in which I have been waiting to see him, that of an elderly man without the eccentricities which he does so well. He gives an excellent performance. Charlotte Henry is appealing and continues to show development. Marjorie Gateson, John Miljan, Pierre Watkin and Charles Wilson have roles which they make impressive.

Irving Pichel's direction is in every way satisfactory. The physical elements at his disposal, meadows, stables, race tracks, were varied in extent and nature and he had a wide assortment of characters to deal with, but he blends everything into a smooth and steadily moving whole. I

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am sorry the screen does not make greater use of him as an actor, but if he prefers a career as a director his great ability should make him a good one.

Two cameramen are given credit, Ernest Miller and Jack Marta. I do not know which of them is entitled to praise for several beautiful examples of photography possessing a rich, velvety quality not maintained throughout the production.

### *Santley Comes Through*

WALKING ON AIR, Radio release of Edward Kaufman production. Directed by Joseph Santley; screen play by Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby, Viola Brothers Shore and Rian James; story by Francis M. Cockrell; photographed by J. Roy Hunt; special photographic effects by Vernon Walker; musical director, Nathaniel Shilkret; songs by Harry Ruby and Bert Kalmar and Sid Silvers. Cast: Gene Raymond, Ann Sothern, Jessie Ralph, Henry Stephenson, Gordon Jones, George Meeker, Maxine Jennings, Alan Curtis, Anita Colby, Patricia Wilder, Andre Beranger, Charles Coleman, A. S. Byron, Frank Jenks, Manny Harmon, Arthur Hoyt, Robert Graves, J. Maurice Sullivan, Jack Rice, Fred Santley. Running time, 68 mins.

JOSEPH SANTLEY'S deft direction realizes to the full all the entertainment possibilities of this amusing little story. He enters into the fun of the thing by refusing to take it seriously and going all the way from high comedy to outright farce. A scene in a broadcasting station is so absurd that it could not happen, but by the time it is reached the mind of the audience has been mellowed past the point of meticulous criticism and it complaisantly accepts the absurd scene as a legitimate part of the story. That means both good screen writing and good direction. And it suggests a thought for both writers and directors.

The first thing to strive for in creating a motion picture is to establish in the mind of the audience a friendly feeling for what is offered it. We permit our friends to do things we would not tolerate if done by people for whom we have no friendly feeling. *Walking on Air* appeals to us pleasantly from the first scene. It is mounted with good taste, a high degree of artistic merit being attained in the construction and dressing of the sets. The people in it are nice, the women gowned handsomely and the men attired modishly; much of the dialogue is sparkling with wit; the story proceeds consistently, and agreeable musical interpolations do not seriously impede its forward progress.

All these elements unite in making the picture a piece of entertainment we accept as we do a friend, and if it wants to make a fool of itself in a broadcasting station, it is all right with us as long as it does not go beyond the bounds of good taste. If, on the other hand, the picture had not succeeded in enlisting our friendly interest, if there had been irritating scenes in it, we would have accepted the broadcast scene as just another affront, and those who wear hats would have reached for them. I do not wear a hat, a statement which I admit has no place in a review of a motion picture, and one which has personal application only to me and my hair.

Gene Raymond never before pleased me so completely as he does in this picture. He shares with Bob Taylor the handicap of features so regular and handsome that character can not struggle through them and make itself evi-

dent. This makes them more popular with women than with men. Jimmy Stewart, on the other hand, is a type of man whose features please the eye by virtue of the character they reveal, by their adaptability to a display of emotions, and their disregard of classic masculine standards. We give Stewart freely what Raymond and Taylor have to strive hard to earn. In this picture Raymond comes through as a he-man, playing the part with ease, sureness and understanding.

It looks as if my flock of screen sweethearts, Frances Dee, Joan Bennett, Mary Brian, Olivia de Haviland, Beverly Roberts, Madge Evans, Una Merkel—but the list is too long to complete—will have to move over and make room for Ann Sothern. I fall more in love with her every time I see her. She does splendidly in *Walking on Air*. Those fine troupers, Jessie Ralph and Henry Stephenson, give their usual masterly performances, and Charles Coleman, Gordon Jones, Patricia Wilder and Andre Beranger also make their presence felt.

### *Excellent Ending*

STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER, Paramount release of A. M. Botsford production. Supervised by Sidney Brod; directed by Stuart Heisler; from story by Lucian Carey; screen play by Madeleine Ruthven; photographed by Alfred Gilks; assistant director, Harry Scott. Cast: Ralph Bellamy, Katherine Locke, Andy Clyde, David Holt, Bert Hanlon, Noel Maison, Paul Fix, Purnell Pratt, Onslow Stevens, Rollo Lloyd. Running time, 65 mins.

Reviewed by PAUL JACOBS

SWEEPING suddenly into one of the finest examples of progressively sustained suspense any audience has this year witnessed, *Straight From The Shoulder* offers the cinematic student enticing fare.

Handicapped almost throughout by the "just boy" antics of David Holt, the story movement drags often in the beginning, but the plot, fortunately, is made of strong dramatic threads which capably weather the irrelevancies clogging the tempo and delaying the interest. In this, and in the subsequent fact that the *raison d'être* is not sufficiently distinct, Madeleine Ruthven's screen script is weak. However, the sympathetically intelligent direction of Stuart Heisler injects a general virility which generously compensates. And had film editor Everett Douglass weeded a twenty minute total of meandering, *Straight From The Shoulder* would be outstanding.

Ralph Bellamy's genial portrayal of a sharp-eyed artist whose hasty sketches of escaping killers brings him a near doom, is smoothly drawn. But the girl-friend, Katherine Locke, seemed to me to be a trifle breathless, as though in perpetual expectancy of the last-reel proposal.

An added strength is the exceptional work of the support. Andy Clyde, for example, infuses the entire film with his expert handling of dramatic mood, character- portrayal in its most finished form. And it goes without saying that Noel Madison turns in the flawless performance audiences have come to expect from this ill-used master. Deft and forceful histrionics, characteristic of the Old Guards, is offered by Bert Hanlon, Paul Fix, Purnell Pratt, Onslow Stevens and Rollo Lloyd. It is always difficult to review the work of these old-timers; there is never anything to criticize.

## Stoloff's Good Job

DON'T TURN 'EM LOOSE, Radio production and release. Robert Sisk, associate producer; directed by Ben Stoloff; screen play by Harry Segal and Ferdinand Reyher; suggested by Thomas Walsh's story, 'Homecoming'; photographed by Jack Mackenize; assistant director, Ivan Thomas. Cast: Lewis Stone, James Gleason, Bruce Cabot, Louise Latimer, Betty Grable, Grace Bradley, Nella Walker, Frank M. Thomas, Harry Jans, John Arledge, Frank Jenks, Maxine Jennings, Gordon Jones, Addison Randall. Running time; 66 minutes.

Reviewed by PAUL JACOBS

FROM the name, I infer Ben Stoloff is a Russian. But even if he is not, his direction is worthy of the tradition Russia is building through her director-genius. *Don't Turn 'Em Loose* is one of the most expertly handled class B's it has been my good fortune to see.

As always with any completely co-ordinated work, this smooth offering is difficult to appraise in terms of individual merit; but that Thomas Walsh's *Homecoming* had been outstandingly adapted by Harry Segal and Ferdinand Reyher is forcefully self-evident. Given a terrific impetus by a vivid camera and progressively sustained with powerfully plotted action, *Don't Turn 'Em Loose* gives thrilling proof of what can be done by strict adherence to cino-dramatic law. There are not a dozen irrelevant lines of dialogue; it is terse, fluent, and acts solely as a camera support.

As the father who becomes a tragic instrument of justice, Lewis Stone gives us a masterfully etched portrait of which only the screen's masters are capable. Stone, in my opinion, holds the distinction of never having given a less than outstanding performance.

Largely responsible for this picture's sincerity, Bruce Cabot scores again in the type of role he has been habitually assigned, a nerveless killer who shatters the lives of everyone his leprous personality touches. To be typed is usually a Hollywood tragedy; Cabot makes it effective.

There is very little one can say about Jimmy Gleason. He is one of the unique luminaries who need no ballyhoo. Like that of Lewis Stone, his name on a program predicates a fine performance. As the gangdom nemesis he sustains the exceptional record his talent has made.

As I glance down the long list of names, I realize that further encomiums would be merely repetitious. Read the credits above, and chalk up a large "excellent" after each. As a matter of fact, this review is really superfluous. *Don't Turn 'Em Loose* can be summed up in that one, seldom deserved word—excellent.



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# New York Spectacle

BY FRED STEIN

(The SPECTATOR editor made a suggestion to Fred Stein that he occasionally select a picture as the subject of one of his entertaining contributions to SPECTATOR pages. For this issue he discusses *To Mary, With Love*. For the next issue he has selected *The Devil Doll* and brings all his literary charm and scintillating wit to bear in outlining a treatment the story might have had. Look for *New York Spectacle* in the next issue.)

New York, August, 24, 1936.

LOOKING back at a picture already reviewed in the SPECTATOR: *To Mary With Love*. In calling this an excellent picture, I feel that I am only adding my small voice to the general critical acclaim. The direction, the performances, the photography and the handling of the subject have received the praise which they so conspicuously deserve; there would be little point in my repeating it piece for piece and part for part. I would, however, like to mention a few points which here and there particularly caught my attention. One of the most touching and effective shots was the silhouette scene in which Bill at last tells Mary of his love for her. Here we have a direct example of the cameraman's ability to aid in conveying the exact emotional atmosphere of a scene. Sound is employed intelligently throughout the film. In the average picture all the dialogue comes from the mouths of the actors on the screen, unless, for instance, someone should be required to give forth an off-screen shout. Here, however, sound is used effectively to heighten the drama of many situations; for example, just after Bill and Mary have returned from a weekend in Maine to surprise Jock at his apartment, we see Jock and Bill talking together as Mary walks gaily into the bedroom. Although she is no longer in view, we hear her banter about the weekend as it comes through to the two from the bedroom, and we hear it suddenly stop. We are shocked just as the men are by this break in the middle of a sentence, and know instinctively, as they do, that Mary has made some shattering discovery. By the adroit use of sound the director has told this part of the story far more completely than he could have through any more direct and more obvious method.

\* \*

AS ANOTHER instance of the intelligent use of sound in this film, I would mention the scene in which Jock, in his first depression job as salesman in a large department store, receives his paycheck and discovers a slip in the envelope which informs him that he will no longer be needed. As he stands there in despair and as he goes through the milling crowd to the office of the manager, and during his cursory interview with this person, we hear all about him the humming cheerful noises of thousands of employees wishing one another Christmas joy. Thus sound is used intelligently to underline the poignancy and irony of a situation. This irony is then made doubly insulting by visual means when we see the manager





*Hollywood*

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**S P E C T A T O R**

Eleventh Year

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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Volume 11

SEPTEMBER 12, 1936

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Directors' Alibi for Loud Talking  
National Interest in Screen Study  
Box-Office Value of Old Friends  
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Setting a Mood with Opening Titles



ISLE OF FURY

A SON COMES HOME

THE GORGEOUS HUSSY

THE GENERAL DIED AT DAWN

OLD HUTCH

WIVES NEVER KNOW

ALL AMERICAN CHUMP

SITTING ON THE MOON

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A MOTION PICTURE PUBLICATION WRITTEN SOLELY FOR MOTION PICTURE MINDS

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Gary Cooper



From the

# Editor's Easy Chair



**DIRECTORS** alibi loud dialogue by claiming the fault lies with theatre projectionists who step it up too much. There is no virtue in such an argument. It is the intonation at the source of the dialogue, not the volume of its reproduction in theatres, that makes it a strain on the ears of an audience. "Stepping down" will not remove from a line of dialogue the fact of its having been uttered too loudly. Nor is mere loudness irritating to an audience. A shout that should be a shout will not annoy it, but when two characters sit within a foot of one another and converse in tones loud enough to be heard across a big room, the mere fact of the loudness of their voices makes the scene irritating. To the extent the projectionist steps down the volume when the scene is on the screen, is the tenor quality of the voice accentuated. The lower range, which gives a voice whatever musical quality it possesses, is the first to be affected by the stepping down process. This, in effect, increases the less musical tenor quality, thereby making the voice less attractive. It is on the set, therefore, not in the theatre, that voices have to be modulated to match the moods of dialogue scenes. The sound man can pick up a whisper and the projectionist can make every member of an audience hear it. Which seems to put it up squarely to the director.

\* \* \*

**LANDSCAPE** is easier to look at than a pinpoint. Somewhere between the two is a line which marks the end of eye-rest and the beginning of eye-strain. There is an affinity between visual concentration and mental concentration. In viewing a motion picture there is less effort, both visual and mental, in grasping the story significance of a broad composition than in grasping that of a piece of the composition segregated and enlarged by the close-up process when the point thus emphasized is not important enough to justify its segregation from the whole. Sacrificing composition by bringing the camera close to characters speaking dialogue too inconsequential to make it necessary for the audience to get an intimate glimpse of the facial expression of the speakers, is not justified, and tends to lessen the effectiveness of close-ups when the demands of the story make them desirable. On the stage the attention of the audience is directed to the speaker by the act of attention by the other members of the cast sharing the scene with him. With greater ease the picture audience can follow the course of the dialogue as its source is shifted from one player to another. The camera brings the audience across the footlights and into the presence of the characters, but it should not bring it

so close to the scene that it can see but one character at a time when lines of slight dramatic value are being read.

\* \* \*

**ONE** common fault of motion pictures is the inclusion in them of so many things not there as a result of intelligent reasoning. The greatest of those are close-ups not made necessary by the story. Players have a false idea of the value of close-ups; they seem to think that a dozen makes them twice as important to a picture as a half dozen. The only thing that makes a player important to a picture is the picture itself. If it is a good picture, he benefits by being part of it; if it is a poor picture, a score of close-ups will not benefit him. In scenes in which the story is being advanced solely by the dialogue—it might be termed "narrative dialogue" when the facial expression of the players adds no value to it—close-ups are unnecessary, and they lessen the pictorial effectiveness of the scenes by eliminating the composition which gives them their entire meaning. Such superfluous close-ups harm the picture, and when a picture is harmed, the players in it are harmed accordingly. Bad pictures, not bad performances, are responsible for an established player's loss of popularity. The film industry's unwise practice of selling personalities, instead of pictures, to the public, makes the persons the first sufferers when the picture in which they appear fails to please the public. A player's interest, therefore, lies in the picture as a whole and not solely in his own contribution to it. And certainly not in the number of his close-ups.

\* \* \*

**CINEMATHINGS:** Robert Riskin, brilliant scenarist, will be a brilliant director. It is a sure bet. His only handicap is his reputation. We probably will expect his first picture to match in quality the last by Frank Capra, with whom he so long has been associated. If he gives us just a good one we probably will be disappointed. But it is logical for a scenarist to become a director. One who can put a complete motion picture on paper should be able to put it on the screen without loss of values. Anyway, the SPECTATOR is rooting for Riskin to make good. . . . Teaming Helen Broderick and Victor Moore, as Radio announces it will, is a good idea. Each of them is a born screen player. They can say more with their eyebrows than a lot of actors can with their tongues. The screen, therefore, is a better medium for display of their abilities than the stage could be. Eyebrows are of little use on the stage. . . . I think I wrote this before: The laughter which greeted Zasu Pitts' appearance as the dis-



*Sara Haden*



**CASEY ROBINSON**

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FOR  
WARNER BROTHERS**

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ARMETTA**



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to  
**UNIVERSAL**

**GEORGE RAFT**

**SHE COULDN'T TAKE IT  
IT HAD TO HAPPEN  
(For Columbia)  
YOURS FOR THE ASKING  
(For Paramount)**



tressed mother in *All Quiet on the Western Front* when it was previewed in San Bernardino, was due to the fact that the picture which preceded it on the screen showed Zasu in a comedy role, and the audience still was in the mood to laugh at her. If she had not been in that picture, she probably to-day would be the screen's greatest tragedienne. . . . Of course, my wish is that two such fine young people as Joan Blondell and Dick Powell live happily ever after, but I don't like this idea of two SPECTATOR subscribers marrying one another. We lose a subscriber. . . . Metro is lining up some good parts for Spencer Tracy. If you stretch your memory back over all the parts Spencer has played during his screen career, you will find his name popping up for consideration when you are trying to determine who is the best actor on the screen. . . . He would be a wise producer, who, realizing there is too much dialogue in pictures, would call in Tom Miranda to write one of the silent scripts he can write so well, and then insert the dialogue that should be recorded. In that way the producer would discover how little dialogue is necessary in a real motion picture.

\* \* \*

**WHEN** in the last issue we announced that hereafter SPECTATOR pages would be open to advertisers at all times and not only in four quarterly numbers each year, we hardly expected such immediate response as the pages of this issue bear testimony to our having received. Many times during the past ten years I have expressed in these pages my opinion that personal advertising by picture people did good only to the advertising medium, not to the advertiser. I could not understand why leading directors and writers, protected by contracts, should pay to have their names in advertising columns; why stars and featured players who always are in demand, should spend money to keep their names before the personnel of the film industry. And because I was sincere in this belief, I reiterated it in print, somewhat to the detriment of the SPECTATOR's career as a commercial venture. Now, with equal sincerity, I hold a contrary opinion. My honest, unselfish advice to those who can afford it is to keep their names before the studio public. Free publicity is of little value. Hollywood knows all such matter is written by press agents and is not the expression of those who employ them. But when a director, producer, writer, or player spends his own money in keeping his name before those who can employ him or influence his employment, he is creating the impression that he is taking himself seriously, that he has confidence in his ability as a marketable quantity which a producer can sell at a profit; is using some of the revenue of his prosperous days to make his continued financial success assured.

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**RECALL** some of the names famous yesterday but not seen on marquees to-day, also directors, writers and production executives who have passed out of the picture. Then scan the smaller list of those employed yesterday and whose names still are on studio pay-rolls. My conversion to the efficacy of personal advertising is due to such a survey. Most of those whose names have disappeared from pay-rolls are those who did not keep their names before the studio public; many I know who, when they could afford it, boasted they did not believe in ad-

vertising. They are people who did not make their names news, who did not keep themselves before the public sufficiently to establish them as persons the public desired to read about in the columns of newspapers and periodicals. Those whose names remained on pay-rolls are those who did not allow their names to be forgotten. Even to-day people come to Hollywood with reputations which make them news, bury themselves in studio offices, do not act on the belief that personal advertising is of value, depend upon their work to assure their future, but, because they are not talked about, disappear into oblivion when their contracts expire. I recently criticized a picture adversely. The production executive responsible for it is my friend. There was no reason why I should have mentioned his name in my review, hence I did him a good turn by not dragging it in. This morning I received a complaining letter from him. Why had I ignored him? he asked. He has the right idea. He likes praise, of course, but not as heartily as he hates being ignored. In writing my review I did not take that into account. The SPECTATOR's opinions are in no measure influenced by advertising patronage accorded it. All it has for sale is space. It believes sincerely that its columns are the most valuable available to those who wish to keep their names before both their present employers and those who perhaps may employ them in the future.

\* \* \*

**PARAMOUNT** obligates itself to pay Bob Burns fifty thousand dollars per picture for six pictures. I hope Bob makes good and that after his half-dozen appearances he will get a hefty boost in his pay check. But I can not believe Paramount is justified in being so enthusiastic about the Burns ability to entertain an audience more than once.

\* \* \*

**CINEMABOBS:** Dick Foran, Warner red-headed, handsome, singing actor, has been promoted from Westerns to more important pictures, and does not like it; prefers the healthy atmosphere of the open air pictures, and cares not who plays to the adults of the nation as long as he can play to the kids, sentiments which do him credit. . . . Predictions are made that in a few years all pictures will be photographed in color, that a third dimension process will be developed. If both come true, some wise person is going back to the first principles of screen art, shoot pictures in black and white, ignore the reality of depth, understand the difference between reality, which the screen should not have, and the illusion of reality, which it must have, and do all the box-office business there is, while producers of all-color epics are having a lot of fun showing them to one another. . . . Anyone who advocates universal use of color hasn't the remotest notion what a motion picture is. . . . Caught Mitzi Green on the radio a couple of weeks ago. The talent she displayed soon will bring her back to Hollywood. . . . The proper interval of absence from the news columns having elapsed, we can expect to hear from Winnie Sheehan any day. Too young to retire, too energetic to loaf, too ambitious to let others do all the big things, but too cautious to leap before he looks, it is a good bet that he will not stay out of harness much longer and that he will be off to a flying start when his plans are

announced. . . . A Los Angeles attorney wants the American Bar Association to press for the passage of a law to prevent the screen showing pictures which reflect discredit on lawyers. As long as there are shyster lawyers, the screen will have a right to use them as characters in pictures. Trying to stop it by law is a silly proceeding.

\* \* \*

**A** RECENT issue of the ably edited *Motion Picture Herald* devoted considerable space to a discussion of the extraordinary interest educational institutions of the United States are manifesting in the motion picture as a subject for study. Motion Picture Appreciation courses are mounting into the thousands, and social groups in increasing numbers are turning their attention to the screen. It is a healthy sign, one fraught with importance to the future of pictures. Truly the screen is still in its infancy. Hollywood is doing great things now, but twenty years hence it will blush when it thinks of its present efforts. Its physical progress always has far out-distanced its intellectual development. It has been too busy making pictures to learn how they should be made. Every picture it produces is further evidence of complete ignorance of its medium, but its present producers are too old, not in years, but in self complacency, to pause long enough to acquaint themselves with the fundamental principles which should govern the creation of screen entertainment. Knowledge, now lacking, inevitably must come to be the power in Hollywood. The future great writers, directors and producers now are in the classes studying the motion picture. They will come to Hollywood equipped with *knowledge*. They will know *why* the screen is the greatest of all the arts, *why* audible dialogue should be a supplementary factor in telling a story, *why* the camera must bear the chief burden of telling it, *why* color photography in feature pictures merely is fresh evidence of picture ignorance.

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**F**OR years the SPECTATOR has been endeavoring to impress upon Hollywood the why of all these things, but the reality of the film industry's financial success has stood as a wall between it and a desire to study the source of the success. There is no such wall in front of the eager young people all over the country who regard the screen as an engrossing study, not merely as something from which money may be extracted. And, as always is the way with such logical approach, those among the eager young people who adopt pictures as a career, will make so much money that to-day's earnings will look to them like a petty cash account. Knowledge is power, but power makes profits. It is a source of satisfaction to the SPECTATOR that it figures prominently in the spread of screen knowledge. Its reading is recommended on every list of aids to motion picture study compiled by any educational institution or social group in the United States. Schools and colleges which have become paid subscribers to it now near the five hundred mark, and at the present rate of increase the thousand mark shortly will be reached. The editorial policy will be tuned to accord with this growing circulation, for every educational institution added to the subscription list means many new readers. For them this issue contains an extended review of *The Gorgeous Hussy*, and an article on screen fundamentals

by Paul Jacobs. Each issue hereafter will carry articles intended primarily for classes studying motion pictures.

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**W**HEN I read that some director has brought in a picture two or three days under schedule, I put it down as just another that will suffer at the box-office. Time saving is regarded as something reflecting credit on a director. It would be more to his credit if he spent all his available time making a picture that will make money when exhibited and not one that saves it on the set.

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**U**NIVERSAL, at the big party it gave a couple of weeks ago, surprised its guests with the parade of talent it has signed for pictures and astonished it with one little person who appeared in the parade. Deanna Durbin is thirteen years of age. A pretty little thing, dressed in a simple silk frock, she came diffidently to the stage and with a fleeting smile waited for the orchestra to complete the introductory notes of a soprano aria she had chosen. Then Deanna began to sing, to sing with voice, intelligence, musical appreciation and feeling, so that with closed eyes, one could have imagined himself at the Metropolitan, listening to one of its famed divas singing. Effortlessly, strictly true to pitch, the glorious soprano voice poured out with quality and volume that amazed the audience and held it spell-bound. Complying with a tumultuous demand for more, Deanna sang a popular ballad, *Make Believe*, and, as the audience could not get enough, she added an attractive little song, *Lost*, Deanna is not just a great child singer. She is a great singer. I chatted with her later in the evening. She is a sweet little thing, beautiful, outwardly self-possessed, but her fine eyes betrayed her inward reaction to the tremendous sensation she had caused. In her Universal has a potential great star, but also a grave and great responsibility. She is a person as well as a singer, and much of her charm always will be her personality. She is such a nice, wholesome, gentle child now that it would be a crime if Hollywood's not particularly refined sense of showmanship let the scars of its greed for gold mar the beauty of her character as it develops.

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**W**ITH the release of *The Gorgeous Hussy*, Beulah Bondi is going to be acclaimed for the splendid performance she contributes to it. For years she has done good work on the screen and has needed only the combination of a good part and a good director to gain her recognition as an outstanding artist. Hollywood has scores of Beulah Bondis of both sexes, character players who have given their best years to both silent and talking pictures. Most of them are walking the streets while the roles they might play with distinction are given to actors who are attracting momentary attention on the New York stage. One of the most ridiculous contentions of our massively salaried picture producers is that the public constantly is clamoring for new faces. On the whole, the film industry would be better off now if five years ago a wall had been built around Hollywood to keep out all new talent, and the attention of producers had been devoted to developing the talent the wall enclosed. We want to see new faces on the screen no more than we want to see new faces in our drawing rooms every time we enter-

tain. In both instances our desire is to see old friends around us. If Beulah Bondi had been a stranger to us, we would have appreciated the fine points of her performance, but we would not have warmed to it as we do by virtue of the satisfaction it gives us to see an old friend making good. That is elemental psychology only picture producers are incapable of understanding. If they understood it they would call back to the screen those whose long and distinguished service to it made them our friends.

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**PRODUCERS**, however, have one attribute all of us well might envy: They are utterly incapable of making a mistake. If a picture proves a box-office failure, it is due entirely to the lack of new faces, to a sudden and unexpected shift in public fancy—never to the fact that its producer fell down on his job. They talk of new faces when what they lack is new brains. Screen art is unique in that there never is an excuse for turning out a poor example of it. At the film industry's command is every mechanical device which human ingenuity can contrive to aid in the fabrication of motion pictures. The best writing brains in the world, the greatest players, the foremost scenic artists, musicians, dance directors, cameramen, all are available for work in pictures. An unsatisfactory scene can be shot over again until it becomes satisfactory. If anything is lacking when the film is assembled, a cut here, a scene added there; more music here, less there—a dozen tinkering can be effected to make it perfect before the public sees it, yet if I applied a meticulous standard to my estimate of the pictures I see, the SPECTATOR never would contain a wholly favorable review. Hollywood producers think only in terms of the externals of their product and are blissfully ignorant of its fundamentals. If they switched to the making of automobiles and applied the same principles, the bodies would be gorgeous things to look at, but they probably would forget to install engines.

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**OUR** host at a Beverly Hills dinner party, a man high up in the film industry, assured us while we dined that in five years there would be no more white and black motion pictures, that all Hollywood's product would be shot in color, that the public would demand color, that it was foolish to show landscapes, sunsets, women's gowns in black and white when they could be presented in color. Later in the evening he took me from room to room to show me the etchings adorning their walls, landscapes, sunsets, women's gowns, exquisite examples of the etchers' art, which, he assured me, he preferred to things done in color.

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**JUDGING** by what Henry Duffy is producing so handsomely at El Capitan Theatre, the trend of modern drama is away from a straightline plot and toward characterizations which appeal to us as such, but which blend into a coherent whole to give a semblance of progressive narrative to a play which has no well defined theme. I saw *The Distaff Side* after a long writing day topped by an earnest game of rummy with K.C.B. in which I lost seventy-five cents, consequently I was not at my brightest. If the play had a definite theme, it es-

aped me, but the excellence of all the performances by no means escaped me. *The Distaff Side* is an acting treat, a series of expertly carved human cameos which fit neatly, each in its place, in a domestic pattern of high artistic merit and entertainment value. Five women carry the burden of the play. Blanche Yurka and Estelle Winwood attract the most attention by virtue of the combination of their roles and their abilities. Margalo Gillmore and Henrietta Crossman also give splendid performances. The whole cast, in fact, deserves praise for giving us a thoroughly enjoyable play. Robert Henderson's direction is excellent, and, as is his habit, Ernest Glover designed some highly attractive sets.

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**JOTTINGS:** After more than ten years of criticizing pictures, I know only one man who is mad at me for anything I have written, and he has been mad so long it has become a habit with him which both of us cherish. . . . Appears to me that Jesse Owens is doing a sensible thing in turning professional, and that the A.A.U. is making itself unpopular in harrasing him; problem of all of us is making living by doing what we can do best, and if Jesse can make money by running faster and jumping farther than anyone else, he is justified in doing so. . . . Sending its own sports editor to cover Olympic Games in Berlin is just another exhibition of the greatness of *Los Angeles Times*, one of America's truly great newspapers. . . . A friend who saw *San Francisco* tells me one of the bricks Clark Gable claws out of his way in his frantic search for Jeanette MacDonald, bears the stamp of a brick company which was not in existence at the time of the earthquake; they *do* notice the tiniest things! . . . Old things are the best; radio broadcast of Community Sing Sunday afternoons is becoming very popular; made up of many voices singing oldtime songs; reminds me of visits to Ziegfeld Roof where I used to join in when the whole audience sang popular songs, the words of which were shown on a screen. . . . It's been a hot summer, but the bulk of the product turned out by the studios during the hot months has not been so hot. . . . I like to chat with Maureen O'Sullivan to see again the Irish blue of her Irish eyes. . . . Producers are displaying a greater disposition to be honest with their public; *The Big Noise* is the title of a recent talkie. . . . After seeing Claude Rains in *Hearts Divided*, I can imagine no one else in the role of Napoleon. . . . Twenty-five hundred years ago Lao-Tse, Chinese philosopher, said: "How can one be serious with the world when the world itself is so ridiculous?" And never so ridiculous as it is now. . . . Will someone please make a picture that does not fade out on the heroine's lips clinging to the hero's?

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**WHEN** a book is the source of story material for a motion picture, the producer is under obligation only to the picture and not to the book. He is justified in taking any liberties with the book which he feels will enhance its entertainment values when it appears on the screen. But, even so, he must give some consideration to the preconceived ideas readers of the book will have of the characters prior to their appearance on the screen. If the book describes the heroine as tall and stately and the screen presents her as short and tomboyish, those who

liked her in the book will resent the transformation. *Gone With the Wind* gives promise of duplicating the success of *Anthony Adverse*, and when Dave Selznick brings the former to the screen, he would be wise in taking only such liberties with it as can not be avoided. If you have read the book, you have your own conception of the players you visualize as fitting the various parts. I have my conception. For the leading part I would cast Constance Bennett, who seems to me to be ideal for the role of *Scarlett*. Clark Gable would make a good *Rhett*. As *Melannie* I would cast that talented actress, Julie Haydon; as *Ashley*, Philip Holmes; *Frank*, Charles Butterworth, provided he played the part straight and avoided comedy; *Pitty Pat*, Mary Boland; *Scarlett's* father, Tom Moore; her mother, Nana Bryant; *Mammy*, Louise Beavers. Will you cast the picture and send your list to the SPECTATOR?

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**O**NCE I saw a motion picture in which a character packed a bag sanely, putting in the clothes neatly and without undue haste. If I remember rightly, it was thirteen years ago.

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**W**HAT an extraordinary business that of the screen is! Its production centre is turning out pictures for which its customers (film theatre owners), have to pay so much there is no profit in showing them. To remedy the situation there is a movement afoot among theatre owners all over the country to increase admission prices in all classes of houses. If Hollywood were producing the kind of entertainment the public liked, admission prices, naturally, could remain as they are and the theatres would make money. But talkies can not maintain the popularity earned by silent pictures. The truth of that statement is proven by the fact that in the silent days practically all film theatres made money and now most of them are struggling to keep going. And the only way out the industry as a whole can see is to charge the public more for the kind of entertainment it does not like well enough to patronize now to the point of making its showing profitable. It seems to me that a sounder solution would be to leave admission prices at their present level and raise attendance by increasing the entertainment quality of the product.

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**S**ILENT pictures did not make money solely because they were silent. They were successful primarily because they told stories in the elemental language of pictorial symbols, because they provided visual entertainment that reduced their audiences to a common intellectual level. They made it possible for the audience to enjoy dramatic entertainment without having to listen to, and digest mentally, emotions expressed in words. That the public did not attach importance to silence itself was demonstrated when the enthusiasm for the first talkies ran the attendance in this country up to one hundred and twenty millions weekly. That there is something fundamentally unsound in the talkie form of screen entertainment is proven by the fact that attendance is so small now admission prices have to be raised if the majority of exhibitors are to stay in business. It is proven further by the fact that double-bills and give-aways fail today to

attract the same audience that single bills and no premiums attracted in the silent days. Increasing admission prices merely is penalizing the public for the shortcomings of Hollywood producers in not having kept intact the elements that made the silent screen so popular, and using the microphone as a supplementary device to make printed titles unnecessary.

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**S**AT next to Barbara Stanwyck and Robert Taylor at the preview of the new Astaire-Rogers picture. Generally I skirt around the uttermost rim of the autograph evil, but this time, when the picture ended, I found myself in the middle of it. I don't know what happened to Barbara and Bob; the last I saw of them they were warding off a mass attack in the theatre and attempting to flee through a side exit. Before the preview, Bill, the alert, efficient and highly popular head waiter at the Vine Street Brown Derby, captured a determined young woman in front of the booth in which I was dining. In the next booth, Francis Lederer, her intended prey, was entertaining guests at dinner, and she was bearing down on him with a great deal of determination in each hip. Politely, but firmly, Bill induced her to right-about-face. For their own protection screen people should take united action to curb the autograph pest. A charge of twenty-five cents for each autograph, the proceeds to go to a film charity, soon would put an end to it. Occasionally, of course, there might be an exception. On another evening Gracie Allen and George Burns were dining near us at the Brown Derby. Two pretty little girls, charmingly dressed, were with their parents nearby. They spotted the famous couple. Timidly, and with alternate elbowing by each to force the other into the lead, the girls finally reached Gracie and George. I could not hear what was said, but the reception accorded the children was cordial. George went to the cashier's desk, secured pen and paper, returned to the booth, and the smiling children went back to their parents, each the proud possessor of the coveted autographs. I might as well confess the SPECTATOR has a weakness for the autographs of famous screen people. It gets a great many of them, but as they are on checks for subscriptions and advertising, they slip right through our fingers.

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**H**ERE is how they rate as to popularity with English motion picture patrons. *The Picturegoer*, a London publication, has been organizing a competition, on scientific and comprehensive lines, to discover the ten most popular men and women of the screen. The men are Leslie Howard, Gary Cooper, Robert Donat, Franchot Tone, Victor McLaglen, Freddie Bartholomew, Clark Gable, Ronald Colman, Charles Laughton, and W. C. Fields. The women are Elizabeth Bergner, Greta Garbo, Katharine Hepburn, Anna Neagle, Bette Davis, Anne Shirley, Joan Crawford, Miriam Hopkins, Shirley Temple, Claudette Colbert, and Grace Moore.

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**M**ENTAL Meanderings: Automobiles hoisted in the air for a greasing job look to me as lonely things being treated in an undignified manner; a human note was struck by one I saw yesterday; a woman was seated in it, calmly knitting. . . . James Bush, one of our most ac-



complished young actors; never met him, but the warmth of the coloring of flowers around the home he built, and the general atmosphere of the whole place which I motor past frequently, make me believe he is a fine young fellow. . . . John LeRoy Johnston, long-time head of Universal publicity, always popular with newspaper people and one of the most efficient of his kind; now at Metro which absorbs publicity heads as fast as they separate themselves from other studios, thereby building up a great department; Johnnie Johnston will add strength to it. . . . Promised Marie, waitress at Paramount restaurant, I would get her Mrs. Spectator's receipt for making lemon pies; mustn't forget. . . . A lot of people bawled me out for my unrestrained praise of *Song of China*; only picture in years to run three weeks at Filmarte Theatre, thereby justifying praise. . . . Attending previews brings one up against closing reels of pictures he has seen before; I have seen end of *San Francisco* a dozen times; being earth-quaked to death. . . . If you will recall the colony of tents in *San Francisco* in which refugees lived, you will be interested to know all the tents were furnished with battered furniture of the period, even though the camera never looked into one.

**A**N INTERESTING slant of the radio broadcasting-film star situation is given by Don Carle Gillette in *Film Daily*: "Exhibitors who have been agitating their tonsils in denouncing the appearance of film stars on the radio will have to answer this one. It is propounded by a star on the defensive side of the issue. He submits that, if just 66 per cent of the squawking exhibits can prove to him that they are plugging his name and his pictures with more effort than they are exploiting bank nights, free bath towels and live turkey prizes, he'll quit the air instanter and confine himself to films."

**T**HREE years ago Robert Taylor was getting thirty-five dollars a week from Metro, and he was on the lot eighteen months before Louis B. Mayer finally discovered him and started him shooting upward. During the lean period he had two firm friends on the lot. Oliver Hinsdell and Harold Bucquet were convinced Bob had the makings of a star, and did everything they could to impress the thought on others. To Taylor's credit is the fact that his sensationally rapid climb to worldwide popularity has left him just the same likeable boy who first came to Hollywood looking for a job. A young fellow who has done what he has done and still keeps his feet squarely on the ground, is a young fellow to admire. That he has excellent taste is manifested by his preference for the company of Barbara Stanwyck. But I would have him know that if I were thirty years younger I would hate him for it.

**A** PHOTOGRAPHIC expert expresses himself in support of the SPECTATOR's argument against the use of color photography in feature pictures. Peverell Marley, one of the better cameramen, says: "Color on the screen seems unnecessary to me. The newer films give us more flesh tones in black and white. The difference between the present black and white and the latest color pictures is the difference largely between oil painting and etching.

I believe camera artists of the future will try more and more to approximate the etcher's ideal rather than that of the colorist."

**U**NLESS he was forced to take only what he could get, Darryl Zanuck did not show any of the genius with which he is credited in agreeing to make three Dionne quintuplets pictures in one year. Intervals of only four months between releases will not allow for enough change in the appearance of the girls to sustain the public's interest in them. A contract of real value would be one providing for the quints to make one picture a year for ten years or more. That would be something! And I suppose every producing organization in the business is dickering for such a contract. Occasionally the production executives should do something outstanding to justify the grotesque salaries they pay themselves.

**W**RITES gossip "Tatler" in *Daily Film Renter*, London: "Then Max Wilder came along, and I haven't seen him or smoked any of his famous Coronas for a hell of a long time." A desperate situation like that certainly takes a jolly bit of fixing, what?

**T**HERE is a little miss, Sally Martin, five or six years old, who is a remarkable actress. I saw her last in *The Killer Dog*, a Pete Smith Short, and her display of emotions running the gamut from gaiety to tragedy and back again, was quite a wonderful demonstration of a child's ability to become the person she is playing. But I suppose when she grows up picture producers will tell her to learn acting, even though there now is not an adult working in pictures who could not learn something from this five-year-old child.

**B**Y WAY of London I discover that Merlin Aylesworth, RKO prexy, regards color in pictures much as I do. "Onlooker" has this to say in commenting in *Today's Cinema* on a conversation he had had with Aylesworth: "Aylesworth agrees that whatever may be the value of color, it is the story value that counts. Color may draw a certain novelty attraction to, but will not make good a bad film. A good film may at this stage be made with or without color. Aylesworth does not really think color so hot as some people. At the present juncture, I think I can sum up his attitude by saying that until we are unconscious that it is color, color will not be worth while."

**W**ILL someone please tell me what value to newsreels is the fame of their narrators? Universal pays a lot of money to Graham McNamee and Twentieth-Century to Lowell Thomas on the assumption that we are interested in them as individuals. The news is all we are interested in when we view a newsreel.

**C**OMMENTATOR," writing in *The Daily Film Renter*, London, says: "Alperson is here on behalf of Grand National, of which he is president, to open up a series of exchanges—by which, I assume, he means renting branch offices." Correct, Commentator, provided I am correct in my assumption that by "renting branch offices" you mean a series of exchanges.

# Reviews of Previews



## How Clarence Brown Directs

THE GORGEOUS HUSSY, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. A Clarence Brown production. Directed by Clarence Brown; produced by Joseph L. Mankiewicz; screen play by Ainsworth Morgan and Stephen Morehouse Avery; from the book by Samuel Hopkins Adams; musical score by Herbert Stothart; dance staged by Val Raset; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, William A. Horning and Edwin B. Willis; gowns by Adrian; photographed by George Folsey, A.S.C.; film editor, Blanche Sewell; assistant director, Charley Dorian. Cast: Joan Crawford, Robert Taylor, Lionel Barrymore, Franchot Tone, Melvyn Douglas, James Stewart, Alison Skipworth, Beulah Bondi, Louis Calhern, Melville Cooper, Sidney Toler, Gene Lockhart, Clara Blandick, Frank Conroy, Nydia Westman, Willard Robertson, Charles Trowbridge, Ruby de Remer, Betty Blythe, Zeffie Tilbury.

CLARENCE BROWN'S directorial activities cover a wide range of story material, *Anna Karenina*, *Ah, Wilderness!*, *Wife vs. Secretary*, and now *The Gorgeous Hussy*, all far apart in theme and setting, yet possessing one important thing in common—the elements of box-office success. The first three have proven themselves; there need be no misgiving about the financial fate of the new picture.

*The Gorgeous Hussy* is, I believe, the most expert job Director Brown has turned out. Against an historical background and with people who were real a century ago, he tells a story of an innkeeper's daughter who became a political issue, one whose feet trod White House floors with as much assurance as they trod those of the inn where statesmen foregathered to quaff the ale its host provided. The story progresses so smoothly, so effortlessly, we are not conscious of the swiftness it must maintain to cover so much in so short a time.

CLARENCE gives us a new Joan Crawford, an attractive, softened and gentle girl without false eye-lashes and extravagant make-up that in previous pictures suggested the actress playing a part. It is the best performance she has given, one which will earn for her many new friends. Her Peg Eaton is somewhat less the hussy than the real Peg was, if we may accept the gossip of the time as a true estimate of her character. There are other minor distortions of facts, but on the whole *The Gorgeous Hussy* has real value as an historical document. It is offered, not as history, but as entertainment, and departs from history only to become more entertaining. As Peg travels further along the corridors of time, perhaps it is well to give her the benefit of the mellowing influence of a sympathetic screen treatment.

Admirably does Joan maintain the sweetness of her relation with President Andrew Jackson and Rachel, his pipe-smoking, backwoods wife. The President it is who stands between Peg and the attack of malicious tongues, a President played with rare artistry by the brilliant Lionel Barrymore who never appeared on the screen to better advantage. Beulah Bondi, as Rachel, gives a superb performance, by long odds the greatest of her screen career.

The likeable Robert Taylor, rapidly developing into an actor of distinction, strikes a gay note in the opening

sequence, but his early disappearance will be a cause for regret by his immense army of admirers. Melvyn Douglas, Franchot Tone, James Stewart, Sidney Toler, Gene Lockhart are others whose performances are excellent. In fact, the even degree of merit attained by all those in the long cast is an impressive feature of the production.

The decor provided by Metro is up to the high standard long since set by that organization. Herbert Stothart contributes a musical background to some of the sequences, cleverly weaving old airs into a sympathetic accompaniment. The photography of George Folsey attains a high degree of artistic merit.

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BUT Clarence Brown is the hero of *The Gorgeous Hussy*. He first attracted my attention by his direction of *The Goose Woman*, a Universal production starring that really outstanding actress, Louise Dresser. That was in 1925. The next year he made *Kiki*, with Norma Talmadge and Ronald Colman, which was among the notable pictures of its day. Through a long line of outstanding productions, not one of which was a box-office failure, Clarence continued to puzzle me as a director. No picture of his ever failed to win a favorable review in the SPECTATOR, yet I could not put my finger on the element that made his technique productive of such good results. I went to view *The Gorgeous Hussy* determined to find the answer.

Fresh impressions prodded memory until I recalled that every Brown picture I had seen flowed forward with an easy, rhythmic pace so smooth that effort was not suggested. Clarence plans the geography of his sets. His rooms, all furnished, are *en suite*; his doors and archways wide to make entrances and exits easy. That makes for smoothness in the movements of the characters, for unhampered grace in the physical action which carries the story.

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ANOTHER thing I noticed again was that Clarence never shoots against a wall, always has his characters in the foreground and has depth behind them. Apparently he realizes the screen is a pictorial art, that there should be affinity between the mental and physical features, and as much of the physical as is practical should be shown in all the scenes. The screen's greatest advantage over the stage from a pictorial standpoint is the fact that the space behind characters in the foreground on the screen widens until its rear limit is reached, whereas on the stage such space narrows. Another difference is that the perspective of a screen scene is the same to every member of the audience in a properly seated house, while in a theatre it differs, each seat having its own angle and its own line of vision.

Clarence moves his characters well up to the front to gain pictorial value by widening the composition behind them. He gives us a lot to look at. Moving his characters away from walls has another advantage. It permits back lighting. I can not recall his having shown us a scene in which a girl lead was too close to a wall to allow of lighting that would show her at her best. In *Hussy*, much of

Joan Crawford's most pleasing appearance was due to this feature of Clarence's technique.

I doubt very much if Clarence could tell us how he approaches the task of telling his story. To him, no doubt, it is the simplest thing he does. A civil engineer before entering pictures, he brings his early training to bear, makes his plans with such meticulous care that he finds carrying them out an easy job. That is the impression his pictures give me, their lack of apparent effort, of straining for effect.

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**O**NE hot afternoon some years ago I dropped in on Clarence at his home. He was sitting on a shady porch. He asked me to go into the house and fetch him a drink of water; said he was dying of thirst but did not like to disturb the dog lying asleep in his lap—nice old dog, he said—hadn't been well lately—sleeping badly at night. That is the tenderness he reveals in his handling of scenes requiring it. The screen has given us nothing more tender than the love scenes between the rugged old Jackson and Rachel, his wife, a romance beautifully played because it was beautifully directed.

Obviously Clarence does not believe in heroics. He compliments his audience by allowing it to discover its own drama. In *Hussy* there is a renunciation scene between Joan and Melvyn Douglas. They love one another, but for political reasons will not marry, and agree not to see one-another again. At a point when the majority of directors would have Joan bursting into tears and clutching her bosom, Clarence has her quietly asking for a glass of sherry, and when she gets it, she remarks that it is a little more bitter than he usually serves, and she walks quietly away, her back to the camera. A strong sequence because its strength is suggested, not emphasized by devices of the acting art.

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**I**N THIS sequence there is what seems to me a somewhat extraordinary innovation in camera technique. There is a close-up of Joan and Douglas, cutting them off at the waist. They stand back to back, which in itself suggests separation, each apparently afraid to look at the other. In a sustained shot the camera picks up one, then the other, as each speaks. This means the focus is changing with each camera shift from face to face, and when we see the face of one, we see the back of the head of the other, but notwithstanding their different distances from the camera, the focus always is perfect; and the only way it can be done is by changing the focus for each shift while the camera is in action. That is something I never heard of having been done before, a bit of new camera technique that stands to the credit of George Folsey.

All Clarence Brown's skill and feeling would have been to little avail if he had not been given a good screen play to work with. I have not read the book by Samuel Hopkins Adams from which the screen story was written. Sam and I are friends, but I read nothing I know is destined for screen treatment, as I want no preconceived impressions of what the screen interpretation should be. All I know of *The Gorgeous Hussy* story is that Ainsworth Morgan and Stephen Morehouse Avery handed the director a well constructed screen play to work with.

## Illustrated Literature

**THE GENERAL DIED AT DAWN**, Paramount. Produced by William Lebaron; directed by Lewis Milestone; assistant director, Hal Walker; screen play, Clifford Odets; from novel by Charles G. Booth; art director, Hans Dreier and Ernst Fegte; sound, Harry Mills and Louis Mesenkop; photographed by Victor Milner, A.S.C.; film editor, Eda Warren; costumes by Travis Banton; musical direction, Boris Morros; special symphonic score by Werner Janssen; special photographic effects by Gordon Jennings, A.S.C., and Arthur Smith, A.S.C.; technical advisor, Count Andrey Tolstoy; interior decorations by A. E. Freudeman. Cast: Gary Cooper, Madeleine Carroll, Akim Tamiroff, Dudley Digges, Porter Hall, William Frawley, J. M. Kerrigan, Philip Ahn, Lee Tung-Foo, Leonid Kinskey, Val Duran, Willie Fung, Hans Furberg.

**E**MPLYING a playwright to do the work of a scenarist will prove a costly procedure for Paramount in the case of *The General Died at Dawn*. Clifford Odets is a brilliant playwright and he turned out a screen play of high literary merit. Lewis Milestone put it on the screen with superb artistry. Paramount provided a splendid cast and a most impressive production. Unfortunately, however, the picture succeeds only in being illustrated literature and not screen entertainment.

I can see how it happened. The script must have made fine reading and one can understand the studio's enthusiasm for its literary values. But literary values are not screen values. That the studio did not realize this is surprising. Odets wrote as he would for the stage. His dialogue is well done as dialogue, generously sprinkled with philosophical utterances written charmingly, and in a play would have pleased an audience, but in the picture it serves only to delay the action that should move rapidly to develop its dramatic values. Melodramatic in essence, the photoplay moves at a deliberate pace to keep it from treading too closely on the heels of its philosophy. When we should be trembling at the fate of Gary Cooper and Madeleine Carroll, when we fear there is no escape from the death Akim Tamiroff promises them, Gary takes time out to make a long, poetic speech to Madeleine.

**T**HROUGHOUT the picture screen values constantly are sacrificed to theatre values, as could be expected from a script prepared by a man with no screen experience and trained only to express himself in the language of the stage. It made me wonder if Adolf Zukor, in case he broke his leg, would send for an ear specialist to set it. To do so would be no more unreasonable than to ask a playwright to write a motion picture.

When the screen first went talkie, the SPECTATOR protested against its wholesale surrender to the stage, and declared the two arts were as far apart as the poles. Since then it has bored its readers by constant restatement of its opinion. Now it points to *The General Died at Dawn* as proving its case. The story has everything a picture needs, virile action, dramatic punches, pictorial sweep, a new and interesting locale, all lending themselves to the making of one of the greatest screen offerings of the season, yet, by virtue of the stage treatment given it, it lacks everything that accounts for the screen's greater popularity than the stage. Instead of settling down to its business of telling us a stirring story of Chinese unrest, one which moves swiftly as we follow it with our eyes, it proceeds in a highly dignified manner,

pauses at times to permit its author to display his cleverness at writing dialogue, at other times to toy lovingly with a dramatic highpoint, does all the things which we enjoy in a theatre, but find tiresome in a motion picture.

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**E**VERY dramatic scene is stretched beyond the limit of its entertainment possibilities. The general dies at dawn, but the picture predeceases him by two or three days. His death scene is dragged out to the point of our fervent wishing that he would get it over and let us go home. The only value a screen scene possesses is the contribution it makes to the forward progression of the story, to the acceleration it gives the visual flow.

The visual flow should proceed at a rhythmic pace. Continuity is not provided by the cutter's shears. It is provided by the minds of the audience. A motion picture is a succession of pictorial suggestions which the imagination of the viewer unites into a cohesive narrative. We do not take the same mind to a picture house that we take to the legitimate theatre. In the latter we are content to listen to a discussion of a social problem broken into acts, between which we stroll in the lobby and discuss the races. In the picture house we use what the screen offers as material for our imaginations to weave into story continuity which proceeds without interruption, which does not ask us to pause to contemplate a nice piece of acting or to hear a pretty speech. Stage technique, therefore, can not be successful in a motion picture house.

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**A**S I stated at the outset, everything in the picture is done splendidly. The performances are above criticism, the decor strikingly effective, the photography of rich and rare quality. The construction of the screen play is the only weakness. Gary Cooper's name has box-office strength, but I am afraid it is not strong enough to counteract the effect of adverse word-of-mouth criticism the slow pace of the production will prompt.

When I settled down to the writing of this review I found a note attached to the credit sheet the studios hand critics as they enter a theatre for a preview showing. I quote it verbatim:

"To the Reviewer: I would like to call your attention to the musical score of *The General Died at Dawn*, the picture you are about to see previewed. In it we have departed from the orthodox method of picking up cues, and instead have emphasized the general mood of the picture and followed each character with his own musical theme. It is the first score based on the whole-tone scale, and was written by Werner Janssen, one of our foremost American composers. Your reaction to it is a matter of first concern with us.—Boris Morros, Musical Director, Paramount."

The greatest compliment I can pay Mr. Morros' department is to record the fact that I was unaware of the merit or demerit of the music. I was conscious of it, but at no time did it attract my attention to itself and away from the story. To ask a reviewer to take his mind off a motion picture and concentrate on its musical accompaniment is a queer thing for a studio to do. The only perfect picture score is one of which the audience will not

be conscious. Of course, if in this instance the score was assuming the role of a red herring—

## Ruben's Direction Masterly

**OLD HUTCH**, Metro release of Harry Rapf production. Stars Wallace Beery. Features Eric Linden, Cecilia Parker, Elizabeth Patterson, Robert McWade. Directed by J. Walter Ruben; screen play by George Kelly; from story by Garret Smith; musical score, Dr. William Axt; photographed by Clyde De Vinna; assistant director, Dolph Zimmer. Supporting cast: Caroline Perkins, Julia Perkins, Delmar Watson, Harry Watson, James Burke, Virginia Grey, Donald Meek. Running time, 79 minutes.

**O**NE of those rare, down-to-earth glimpses of real people which the screen sometimes affords us; an honest, unadorned tale of a shiftless, lazy husband, his faithful wife and half dozen children, *Old Hutch* will find itself well toward the top of the season's list of well made pictures. Walter Ruben's direction makes it obvious he loved the story George Kelly so ably wrote into the screen play. Like the story itself and its setting, Walter's direction is unpretentious, unassuming, never intrusive. No effort is made to stress a point, none of the children is paraded in front of the camera to make a nuisance of himself, no "comedy relief" is indulged in, none of the standard screen tricks resorted to. It is just a homespun yarn told in a homespun way, and it comes to us as a graphic, sincere slice of life without extraneous trimmings.

Of course, when the poor girl, asked to the rich boy's party, buys a dress and charges it to her mother, we know there will be an ugly scene when the father finds it out. But we are wrong. The father gives the daughter twice as much money as the dress cost. And when the poor girl goes to the party, we know the rich boy's snobby friends will laugh at her and make her unhappy. We are wrong again. The poor girl is the most beautiful guest present and is treated with the utmost courtesy. And so it goes throughout the picture. It progresses smoothly, without irritating bumps, with just ordinary things happening in an ordinary way, a credit to all who had a hand in its making, and particularly to its director.

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**T**HE boy and girl romance is a sweet and tender presentation of young, clean love. It gives us again the sweethearts of *Ah, Wilderness!* Eric Linden and Cecelia Parker, each of whom gains fresh laurels by virtue of a sincere, restrained performance. Eric is an accomplished actor, one of the cleverest boys we have, and he is climbing steadily to screen greatness. Elizabeth Patterson is cast admirably as the long suffering, faithful wife, her performance being one of the best to her credit in a long list of screen appearances. Robert McWade, veteran and able artist, adds strength to the cast.

Wally Beery's characterization is a masterpiece of sincerity and understanding. I can remember no other performance of his which pleased me so much. His ready response to Ruben's intelligent and sympathetic direction keeps him always in tune with the mood of the production. Many of his scenes are shared with a dog which I would like to nominate now for an Academy award for the best canine performance of the year.

## Hervey Writes a Good One

A SON COMES HOME, Paramount. Producer, Albert Lewis; director, E. A. Dupont; assistant director, George Hippard; original, Harry Hervey; screen play, Sylvia Thalberg; sound, Charles Hisserich and Don Johnson; film editor, Chandler House; art directors, Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; photographer, William Mellor, A. S. C.; musical direction, Boris Morros; interior decorations, A. E. Freudeman. Cast: Mary Boland, Julie Haydon, Donald Woods, Wallace Ford, Roger Imhof, Anthony Nace, Gertrude W. Hoffman, Eleanor Wesselhoeft, Charles Middleton, Thomas Jackson, John Wray, Robert Middlemass, Lee Kohlmar, Herbert Rawlinson.

**H**ARRY HERVEY, in his original story from which this picture was made, reveals a flair for dramatic punches which Sylvia Thalberg cleverly weaves into as smooth a job of screen play construction as I have seen of late. Harry almost makes us believe he has located another situation not included in the standard thirty-six. *A Son Comes Home* is not one of Paramount's big pictures, but it is an interesting one by virtue of Hervey's ingenious plot and the direction given it by E. A. Dupont, a director responsible for some important European productions, but who has not been fortunate yet over here to have been given a big story which he has the ability to make into an important American production.

Hervey's story is a straightforward one of a tragic mother with a wayward son. It is an intimate recital, involving no mass effects, and Dupont contents himself with telling it in a businesslike manner without leading it into by-paths to impede its forward progress. He displays restraint in not stressing dramatic climaxes which Hervey has made sufficiently dramatic in themselves to make stressing unnecessary. The composition of many of the scenes permit the camera to be an important factor, William Mellor's photography being strikingly effective.

Perhaps it is because of the ingenuity of the plot and my interest in its development that even the woes of the unfortunate mother did not stir my ever-ready emotions to react sympathetically to her distress. I admired greatly Mary Boland's portrayal of the role, but it was more intellectual appreciation than emotional response. It was four or five years ago that I first urged producers to give heed to the possibilities of Julie Haydon whom I had seen in a three-reel picture. Until I met her here in *A Son Comes Home*, I had not seen her again, on or off the screen. Her role is mainly a negative one, but there is something about her work that rekindles my first enthusiasm for her, a divine spark that shines even in scenes in which she does little. Add to the predictions I have a weakness for making: Julie Haydon some day will be recognized as one of the really great actresses of the screen.

Donald Woods has an important role in *A Son Comes Home*. Ever time this young man appears on the screen he impresses me more. He has an engaging personality and ability to make the best of it. Wallace Ford, Anthony Nace, and Herbert Rawlinson also stand out.

The picture is the last that Albert Lewis made for Paramount before he went over to RKO. If his standard never falls below this example of it, RKO will have reason to congratulate itself upon his acquisition.

## Possibilities Not Realized

ALL AMERICAN CHUMP, Metro release of production by Lucien Hubbard and Michael Fessier. Features Stuart Erwin, Robert Armstrong, Betty Furness, Edmund Gwenn. Directed by Edwin L. Marin; original screen play by Lawrence Kimble; musical score by Dr. William Axt; photographed by Charles Clarke; assistant director, Al Shenberg. Supporting cast: Harvey Stephens, Edward Brophy, E. E. Clive, Dewey Robinson, Eddie Shubert, Spencer Charters. Running time, 70 minutes.

**T**HE story of this one is absurd, almost as absurd as the story of *The Ghost Goes West*. But the *Ghost* story had a René Clair to make it delightful nonsense on the screen. Lubitsch could have done something with the *All American Chump* story; or Frank Tuttle, who has a lively sense of humor and a flair for a story of this sort, could have made it into a picture as riotously funny as the one Clair sent us. Lawrence Kimble's original screen play contains all the elements which make for success, a central idea that is highly amusing and enough subsidiary complications to sustain the comedy for the full length of the picture. But on the way to the screen the story values were lost. The producers and director obviously lack the sense of humor the author displayed. The picture does not realize the wit and sparkle latent in the script.

The chief weakness of Ned Marin's direction is his handling of the dialogue. The lines are spouted with little regard for their comedy values, as if they were something to get rid of as rapidly as possible. There is little voice modulation and no thought given to possible eavesdroppers. In one scene in a hotel room, the door of

WARREN

DUFF

WRITER

*Under Contract to  
Warners-First National*

which is open to the corridor, characters yell speeches that would get them into trouble if they were overheard. Of course, the whole thing is a farcical comedy, but care always should be exercised to see that even farce is not made more implausible than it need be. It gets its strength from its seeming plausibility.

It is some years now since I first wrote that Metro was overlooking a good bet in not making more of the ability of Stuart Erwin. He is featured in this picture and gives an excellent performance, but if all the values of the story had been developed it would have shot him into stardom. He was an excellent choice for the part as the unsophisticated country boy with extraordinary ability as a lightning calculator. None of the members of the cast was as effective as he might have been if the director had been more in sympathy with the spirit of the story. Edmund Gwenn, Betty Furness and E. E. Clive manage to be rather plausible, but the others are too boisterous.

**B**Y eight o'clock in the evening of the opening day of the showing of *Swing Time* (Astaire-Rogers) twenty-three thousand people had paid admissions to the Music Hall, New York, breaking the house record previously established by another Astaire-Rogers picture, *Top Hat*. At the Strand the same day, *Anthony Adverse* grossed eight thousand dollars, and the management announced that the showing of Mervyn LeRoy's great bit of direction would wind up at 3:37 a.m. during the opening week.

## **SPEIRS RUSKELL**

Twenty-one years old. Irish (Dublin), black hair, dark eyes, 5 feet, 11 inches. Complete wardrobe. Requests interviews with casting directors looking for a type who might be developed into a young leading man.

**HEMPSTEAD 3626**

## **A Satisfactory Hour**

**ISLE OF FURY**, Warner Bros. picture. Produced by Bryan Foy; directed by Frank McDonald; screen play by Robert Andrews and William Jacobs; based on novel by Somerset Maugham; photography by Frank Good; film edited by Warren Low; art direction by Esdras Hartley; special photographic effects by Fred Jackman. Cast: Humphrey Bogart, Margaret Lindsay, Donald Woods, Paul Graetz, Gordon Hart, E. E. Clive, George Regas, Sidney Bracy, Tetsu Komai, Miki Morita, Houseley Stevenson, Sr., and Frank Lackteen. Running time, 60 minutes.

**A** REFRESHINGLY new and pictorially romantic locale, a story with surprises in it, excellent direction by Frank McDonald and a cast equal to the demands of the different roles, combine to make this one an hour of pleasing entertainment. It is one of the Warner's smaller productions, but I have seen many big ones which lack the merits it possesses. The action takes place on a South Sea island, a locale always interesting in itself. It contains many superlatively beautiful shots which bear tribute to Frank Good's skill with the camera and McDonald's eye for composition. A storm at sea is shown with turbulent impressiveness which earns praise for the technical department and makes us wonder how it is done. I keep intact my ignorance of the methods technicians employ to get their special effects, with the consequence that I enjoy them hugely.

The story is a variant of the triangle theme, but it is done with a new twist. It opens with a marriage ceremony uniting Margaret Lindsay and Humphrey Bogart. Later the storm spews Donald Woods into the heaving sea from which he is dragged by Bogart. As the story develops, we suspect that Margaret and Donald are displaying a quite considerable fondness for one another, but there is no visible evidence of it, and in the end, hard on the heels of some tense melodramatic happenings, Donald sails away, leaving things on the island much as they were when he was washed onto it.

*Isle of Fury* is one of those pictures which entertain us so pleasantly we accept without protest story weaknesses one would not excuse in others which more directly challenged our critical faculties. On the whole its screen play is a good bit of writing by Robert Andrews and William Jacobs, even though it asks us to accept as plausible the fact of a husband's belief in the word of a renegade wretch in face of the denial by his wife and his friend. The story needed the scene to keep it going, and we let it pass. And we applaud the ending. A bullet snuffs out the character who, gun in hand, seems to be bent on prolonging it unnecessarily. So they shoot him, and it is all over.

McDonald's direction has the valuable quality of revealing no traces of his efforts. The story moves along briskly and smoothly and does not attract attention to anything except itself. The direction of the dialogue is particularly commendable, the lines being delivered in conversational tones which carry conviction. Bogart still talks with a trace of the meticulous diction necessary on the stage but out of place on the screen, but no such fault can be found with other members of the cast.

Miss Lindsay, Bogart, Woods, and E. E. Clive give performances in every way satisfactory.

## Has Its Weakness

**SITTING ON THE MOON**, a Republic feature. A Nat Levine production; associate producer, Albert E. Levoy; directed by Ralph Staub; screen play by Raymond L. Schrock; adaptation by Rex Taylor and Sidney Sutherland; original story by Julian Field; supervising editor, Murray Seldeen; film editor, Ernest Nims; photographed by Ernest Miller; sound engineer, Terry Kellum; songs by Sam H. Stept and Sidney D. Mitchell; musical supervision by Harry Grey. Cast: Roger Pryor, Grace Bradley, William Newell, Pert Kelton, Henry Kolker, Henry Wadsworth, Joyce Compton, Pierre Watkin, William Janney, June Martel, The Theodores, Jimmy Ray, Harvey Clark, George Cooper.

Reviewed by PAUL JACOBS

**T**HERE are just two types of pictures that are a pleasure to review: those one thoroughly likes or those one thoroughly dislikes. It is the *Sitting on the Moon* type that drives the reviewer to an untimely grave.

There is simply nothing to get the critical teeth into—nothing new, suspenseful, or even interesting; but, on the other hand there is nothing viciously stupid in it. Ralph Staub's direction is efficient, gaining full measure of what realism the script afforded. As the song writer who gives his all for the gal's success, Roger Pryor is believable. It seems a pity that Pryor, an excellent actor, should be wasted on thin drivel.

Grace Bradley, who has charm and a sweet voice, shows genuine promise; her role was well handled, with clever emphasis on the few dramatic possibilities it offered.

Since we must resign ourselves to stooges, it must be admitted that William Newell is a good one. And incidentally, *Sitting on the Moon* is one of the few productions I have seen which justified the inclusion of a stooge. Pert Kelton, with new weight and a new wig, executes an age old humor, and the ever-lauded "if you fire my girl friend, you gotta fire me" chorine act.

With corking dances by Jimmy Ray and the Theodores, and competent support by an apparently uninterested cast, Nat Levine's new secondary is of interest only to those who are easily pleased or to swing fanatics for whom one modern wailed song is worth an hour's boredom.

## It's a Natural

**WIVES NEVER KNOW**, Paramount picture. Produced by Harlan Thompson; directed by Elliott Nugent; screen play by Frederick Hazlett Brennan; based on story by Keene Thompson; photographed by George Clemens; musical direction by Boris Morros; art direction by Hans Dreier and John Goodman; sound supervised by Charles Hisserich; Richard Currier, film editor; costumes by Travis Banton; interior decorations by A. E. Freudeman; James Dugan, assistant director. Cast: Charlie Ruggles, Mary Boland, Adolphe Menjou, Vivienne Osborne, Claude Gillingwater, Fay Holden, Louise Beavers, Norma Lee, Constance Bergen, Don Rowan, Arthur Housman, Irving Bacon, Purnell Pratt, Alice Ardell and Edward Gargan. Running time, 71 minutes.

Reviewed by PAUL JACOBS

**T**HE springs of humor usually dry up early in the series of comedy teams Hollywood has produced. But it has been bromidically said that there is an exception to every rule; *Wives Never Know* is a chuckle-churned proof of exception.

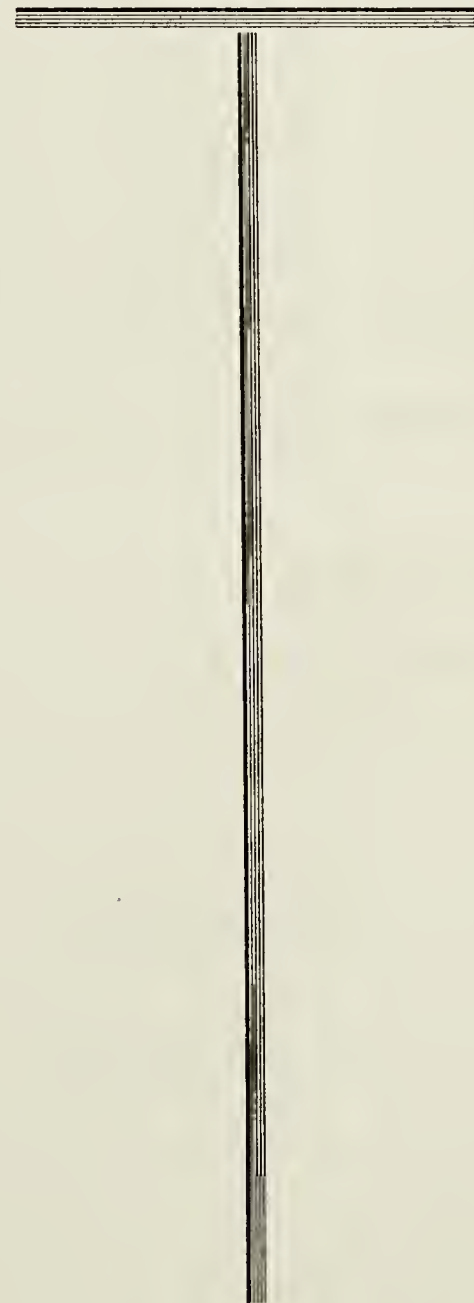
Elliott Nugent has many fine films to his credit, and this one is no exception to the studio axiom that a di-

# ROY DEL RUTH

Directing

BORN TO DANCE

for Metro Goldwyn Mayer



rector's name on a title-sheet is more important than the cast beneath it. Nugent has drawn to their peaks every performer's ability and every second of dramatic humor.

And when the sly brilliance of Frederick Hazlett Brennan is coupled with the dramatic sensitivity of Mr. Nugent, an interesting evening is inevitable. Glancing at the credit sheet before seeing their mutual efforts, I anticipated a riot. I was not disappointed.

To attempt a critical survey of the Boland-Ruggles performances is absurd. Artists in their own right, their incredibly delicate foiling for each other can be appreciated only by the few; for the rest, the robust laughter they evoke is ample justification for family tickets.

As for the support, trust an old-timer like producer Harlan Thompson to call out the Old Guard. Naturally, then, *Wives Never Know* is studded with scintillating bits, and an aura of suave dramatic perfection. What, for instance, can one expect from Adolphe Menjou but histrionic finesse? Like Lewis Stone, he is incapable of anything but an excellent characterization.

Whenever I am faced with a credit sheet of this type, loaded with the best that years can bring, I find myself in a quandry. I want to praise each with words fitting the appreciation his ability arouses in me. But excellence has few honest synonyms, and they are quickly exhausted. From Vivienne Osborne and Claude Gillingwater to Copper Edward Gargan, *Wives Never Know* is enacted in princely fashion, thus making the roll-call complete: From producer to bit-player it is perfectly handled. See it.

◆

Martin  
Mooney

◆

## Cinematic Pulse

By  
Paul Jacobs

A ROAD, pitted and ribbed with flood, winds sinuously, like a spotted adder, into the still distance. The moon gleams brilliantly, a mellow spotlight throwing long gray shadows before every upthrusting growth or wandering drift-fence. On either side, the dust-heavy sage mottled and twisted with shadow, stretches into a smooth, dark blanket, finally lost in an opaque mist-sea which hides the base of the dead slate gray hills. And sheer behind them, a gaunt, flat, washed-out silhouette climbs the grim upper ranges.

This is the credit and title shot of a recent western. Its stark, sinister beauty caught the imagination of its audience. The first step in creating a powerful mood was immediately established. How little we realize the tremendous importance of the film's first ten minutes. And how little we know of opening structure. Let us examine analytically the mechanics and purposes of the story beginning and its relation to the body.

Although seldom utilized, vast potentialities for mood-building lie dormant in the credit shots preceding the actual story. *Trader Horn*, for example, built up a terrific tension long before the picture itself began, by using titles superimposed over stirring jungle scenes and accompanied by suitable music. It is one of the first stories to open with its mood already established.

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AND there is a deeply psychological need for this pre-establishment. Every film centers around some significant point in its leading character's life; some crisis or turning point, some minor or major cataclysm which disrupts the calm flow of habit and routine. The good story starts immediately at the vitals of this problem. It cannot risk losing audience-interest by long preliminary explanations. And yet, a brief delineation of conditions is necessary to the understanding and appreciation of the audience. A well constructed story deals with a single, all pervading problem. Therefore, the unified story contains the same elements in its beginning that we find at its ending; and the more neatly and quickly these elements and conditions are clarified and placed into their plot-relationship, the more quickly is audience-interest flamed into being.

This is where utilization of title shots becomes invaluable. The subtle, underlying implications of character purposes and of destiny-patterns which accrue from the basic problem-elements, form the *genre* of the story—and consequently determine the mood. Thus, if the mood is sunk into the subconscious mind of the audience *before* the conditions producing it are presented, half the fruit of actual explanation is accomplished, clearing the way for a terse presentation of essentials that otherwise would necessitate a lengthy and involved build-up.

I realize this principle, while adhering strictly to the logic of cino-dramatic law, is laid upon a perhaps too esoteric truth to meet the understanding and subsequent approval of Hollywood producers. They occasionally



stumble upon it and reap its benefits without cognizance of its intrinsic box-office value.

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**L**ET us go back to the opening shots. With mood previously established, the temptation to commit moviedom's most common error—destruction of mood by lengthy opening dialogue—is doubled. An understanding of its function would render such a procedure impossible.

The first objective of a beginning is to stimulate immediate interest both in the problem it is explaining and in the explanation itself. There is but one way in which this can be accomplished: to present the story prerequisites not in the form of dialogue, but as the first actual expression of the counter-force working throughout the picture against the protagonist. In other words, the story should open with an immediate objectification of the main problem itself; a situation which clarifies the goal of the hero and the forces against him, by necessitating a specific defensive or aggressive course of action toward the opposition which has manifested its purpose through the dilemma in which, at the outset, the hero finds himself.

Once the audience is aware that an immediate struggle is impending, that powerful forces are already massed against our hero, that he either intends or is forced to take decisive action—once it recognizes the circumstances which gave this crisis birth—at this point interest is brought spontaneously to fever pitch. And here the opening has served its purpose, is finished, and gives way to the body proper.

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**F**ROM the foregoing, it becomes immediately apparent that credit shots done in montage will best serve their dual purpose. But there is an even more significant utility and artistry in this use of montage: Intelligently selected shots, under-currented by music, will not only create the mood but, done skilfully, can be made to definitely suggest the actual *raison d'être* and problem of the plot itself. Thus allowing the priceless boon of a speedy and almost immediate plunge into the story body itself.

This effect is particularly powerful if the montage of the credits are merged into the opening of the story proper. And if the opening itself is montage, forceful and striking psychological reaction can be effected.

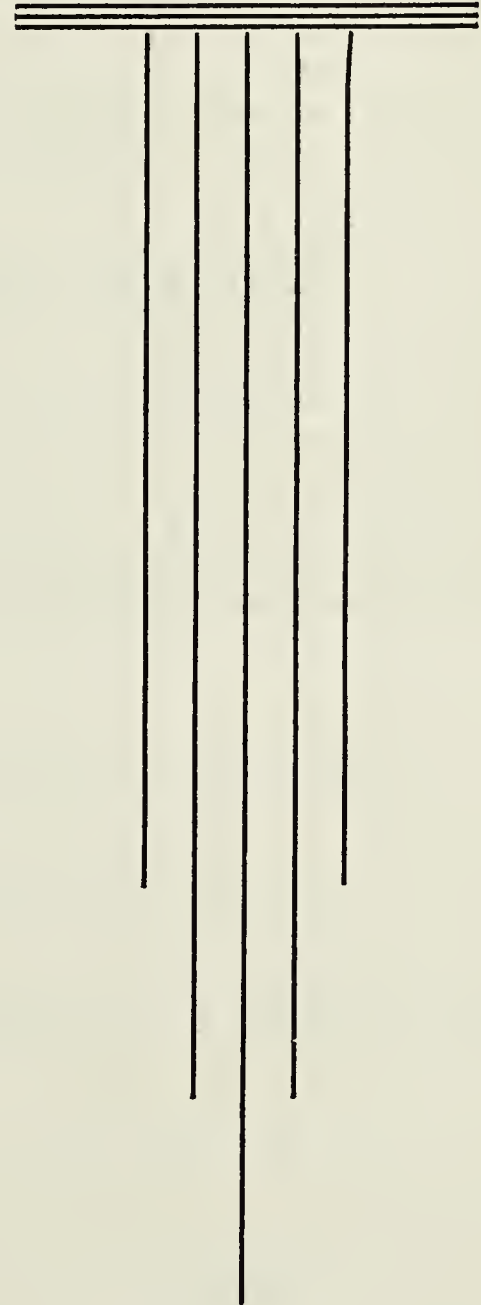
Since the anatomy of the beginning is designed for the purpose of implanting the film's mood and story essence in the consciousness of its audience, every aid to this end is of the utmost importance. Therefore, symbolisms and striking camera angles are valid media for the introduction.

For example, prison bars which loom larger and larger, until they finally fill the whole screen. Or the inclined axis shot which gives us the impression that the policeman or magistrate we are looking at is god-like in his stature and is dwarfing us, looming over our lives. There are, of course, literally millions of combinations of potentialities. Russia has begun to exploit them, with incredibly vast psychological effect.

It really does not seem out of place to suggest that Hollywood redeem its practically forfeited prestige, by first learning and then applying the principles and laws which govern its source of income.

In keeping with Hollywood's self-evident assumption that it can learn nothing of value from the cinematic

*William A. Seiter*



methods of other countries, two producers I know have warned me against the subversive influence of Russian pictures. Naturally, I immediately looked up a Russian picture .

Russia, regardless of our justifiable political prejudices, has advanced far beyond us, artistically and technically. She has learned the secrets of mood, of tempo, of atmospheres induced through unity of impressions; in short, she has learned that cinema is a profound and almost fathomless art. And unless Hollywood rouses from its smug self-satisfaction and its small-mind commercialism, it will one day awaken too late.

Russia has especially learned the application of montage to the creation of mood, and the use of camera angles in enhancing by symbolism an already created atmosphere. In consequence, her films carry an irresistible appeal to the emotions, a psychical unity with the spectator which sweeps him into the actual scene itself. Never have I seen an American film approach this tremendous effect. And I resent the stupid men who are responsible for our having to play second fiddle.

**WRITING** in *London Era*, Rosine Henly, described as an "American star of other days," deals entertainingly with the early film work of Josef von Sternberg who cut pictures in which she appeared. She describes him as being then "a tall, lanky youth." I am afraid Rosine is thinking of two other fellows. I am aware that since those days Joe could have expanded sideways, but I do not see how he could have shrunk from his head down.

ROBERT SISK

R. K. O. STUDIO



# Nation of Devil Dolls

By Fred Stein

New York, September 6.

**M**ETRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER'S *The Devil Doll* exhibits great technical ingenuity and is most entertaining in its strange effects. I feel, however, that so much attention was devoted by the makers of this picture to reducing the characters that the plot was simultaneously and inadvertently reduced to practically nothing. I have not read Abraham Merritt's novel, *Burn, Witch, Burn*, and am therefore not qualified to say how closely the picture follows the story on which it is based. Frank S. Nugent, motion picture reviewer for the *New York Times*, infers that the similarity of the two plots is far from great. It is surprising that those who adapted this material to the screen did not use to fuller advantage the great story opportunity of the basic idea; it is more surprising that they should have allowed the plot as they tell it to be full of hapless illogicalities.

We are delighted to believe that Henry B. Walthal could shrink people, clothes and all, to one-eighth their normal size; on the other hand we are disgusted when asked to believe, for instance, that Lionel Barrymore, who can direct the actions of his puppets from a distance with his will, should risk what would appear to be certain capture in standing at the side of a house which is surrounded by alert police who have been instructed to pick up any suspicious characters. To make this even more improbable, he had already been seen and questioned by the police while wearing the same disguise in which they must have seen him at the house. The film wanted it this way so Barrymore could hear the tortured confession of one of his enemies as it comes down through a window. Surely for the purposes of credibility he could have learned the news in some other fashion.

**A**S LONG as I am indulging in useless speculation concerning what might have been done with the making of this picture, I might as well go a bit further and bring it to a quite different conclusion which would utilize more fully the imaginative possibilities of the fundamental idea and would, at the same time, satisfy a vastly greater number of people. Let us say that Paul Lavond, the father, has retired with his mother to the quiet of a lovely farm somewhere in the province. Here he is seen puttering about with cows and chickens and growing quietly old, when he remembers that somewhere at the beginning of the picture Marcel, his fellow escaped convict, had explained the social merits his wonderful diminishing potion would have if perfected.

Population, according to the Malthusian doctrine, tends to increase faster than the means of subsistence, and therefore unless some measure of control is instituted the race will come to a very sorry pass. Wars are largely caused by economic rivalries and the desire of a people under economic pressure to expand. A person who has been reduced to one-eighth his normal size would be able to fill his stomach with one-half of a potato, and a nation

of people similarly reduced would find themselves instantaneously enriched in territory and in the goods of life by eight times what they had possessed. If all the people of the world were to be shrunk in this way there would automatically be plenty of room and plenty of everything else for everybody. Poverty would be abolished in one swell coup, and war would be a thing of the past.

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**N**OW the imminent savior of mankind goes to work. We see him pursuing his experiments, the gleam in his eye mirrored and reflected all about in the labyrinthian glassware of a laboratory the like of which has never been known outside of a film studio. (This laboratory differs from others seen in pictures only in not featuring a Hollywood retort; some super-agile prop man has at last discovered that with one or two remote exceptions, the omnipresent retort actually never survived the alchemists.) At last, late one night, Lavond sees his final experiment succeed. With abundant joy he writes the last record into his notebook, and goes to bed for a long, contented sleep and the dreams of a great day to come.

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**M**EANTIME, however, the forces of evil have, as usual, been at work. To carry on his experiments Paul Lavond has been obliged to purchase the more obscure chemicals from a neighboring hostile nation. That nation, ever vigilant, has become curious to know what manner of strange purpose they were being applied to in France and this very night, with poor old Paul asleep in another part of the house, a spy creeps softly in and steals the vital documents away. Next day Paul faints at the discovery, recovers and rushes to the proper authorities in Paris with his tale. Naturally no one will believe him and he is hastily committed to an institution for the feeble-minded. The scene shifts to the capital of the neighboring nation, whose Dictator and a few scientists are gathered in a laboratory where Lavond's results are reproduced for them. They are mightily amazed, and go off to meditate on the potentialities of this enormous discovery.

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**N**OW the camera treats us to a private view of the Dictator, sitting in his palace, majestically alone. From his mutterings we learn he is not altogether sane. For years he has thought himself God, and the loneliness has been terrific. It is no wonder that he has become somewhat touched in the head. Charles Laughton as the Dictator could here give the most magnificent performance of his career. He paces, he mumbles, he sits down and looks wildly at his hands. He talks aloud, now lucidly, now making no sense whatever. But we can see the terrible thought which is forming in his fevered brain. It becomes evident that his vanity has reached such colossal proportions that the Dictator can now conceive of the welfare of the nation only in terms of his own personal aggrandisement.

For years he has been exalted by the worship of his people to the most heroic pinnacle, and for years, knowing that he could rise no higher, he has been possessed with the fear that one day he must fall. He thought,



**Ray**

**Enright**



**Director**

**Warner Brothers -**

**First National**



perhaps rightly, that with his fall chaos and destruction would inevitably come to the nation, and this concern for the people had crept like a cancer into his mind. Now by the most extraordinary chance he has been given the means with which to postpone forever his decline. If every person in the nation should drink this fiendish brew, excepting only himself, then all the people would become one-eighth their normal size and he, while remaining the same, would become eight times larger than anyone in the land. He has found the way to increase a popularity, a prestige, an adoration which already had become unprecedented in human history. If he were to become eight times larger than anyone else, who could then deny that he was God?

\* \*

**A**T THE command of the leader, a dozen laboratories set to work to produce millions of doses of the infernal liquor. Naturally no one knew what it was; the spy and the several chemists who were aware of the secret had disappeared immediately under mysterious circumstances. In a few days all was ready. It was carefully explained to the nation that precisely at noon on an appointed day a mighty toast would be drunk to the Dictator, to the All-Highest. In order that this toast should not be drunk in any liquor which had ever before touched the lips of man, a special, hitherto unknown beverage had been prepared for the momentous occasion. Each person received a small sealed bottle containing his share of the precious liquid. Then, at the appointed instant of the

appointed day, the millions of seals were broken and with one simultaneous gulp the nation drank the toast.

\* \*

**A** GREAT shudder shook the land. People by the millions fell senseless to the ground and awoke, a few moments later, to find themselves diminished by seven-eighths. But then something happened which the Dictator could not have foreseen. Instead of being elated when they discovered their new condition, the people were damned mad about it. Perhaps the liquor had wrought some subtle change in their minds and had, in effect, brought them somewhat to their senses. They felt that they had been tricked, and they demanded an explanation. Those who were close enough to him gathered about the now monstrous feet of their leader and cried up to him in their wrath. Thereupon he, too, lost his temper.

These imbeciles would understand nothing, would they? He would show them. And he did, stamping upon as many of them as could not save themselves in the wild scramble which followed. But he was quick to resume his composure and to decide upon a plan. Obviously he must now appear personally before all his people, so that the benefits of their new condition would become apparent to them. Obviously, too, the way to do this would be to call mass meetings throughout the land and to visit each one of them in as rapid succession as he could. The enthusiasm of the people for mass meetings had saved many a situation before this. And then, in a flash, it occurred to him that there would be no need for general mass meetings. Since all the people were now so small, it would be very simple to gather them all together in the greatest public demonstration the world had ever known.

\* \*

**I**MMEDIATELY he sent out the word, and the millions of his subjects streamed toward the capital as fast as their altered size would permit them to go. They encountered some difficulties, of course, in managing the various facilities for transportation, but their native ingenuity conquered obstacles which at first seemed insuperable, and at last they had all arrived. Now in and about a huge stadium they gathered, all of the people in the land. In the stadium sat the elite of the Dictator's party, one million strong, and all about in the surrounding fields were thronged the rest of the people, ready to hear the hallowed words through amplifiers. They had by this time become somewhat accustomed to their new condition, and their anger had considerably subsided, but they were still perplexed and anxious to know what, if any, was the point. And now we near the end of this terrible (sic) scenario.

\* \*

**S**UDDENLY, as the Dictator began to speak, the noise of planes was heard. All looked aloft, and to the common consternation saw a mighty armada of French planes. The cataclysmic events beyond its borders had inevitably come to the knowledge of France, and this great unprecedented opportunity to quell a hostile nation was not to be ignored. Down swooped the planes, each releasing a white, misty spray which settled slowly like a blanket over the scene, pervading the air of the stadium, of the surrounding fields, and of the capital itself. In a



*Thomas E. Jackson*



few moments a great nation had been wiped out—and all the human life that remained was contained in the incoherently babbling and coughing hulk of its quondam ruler. Peace in Europe was assured.

<sup>\*</sup><sup>\*</sup>  
**O**UR final shot takes us again to France, to Paris where in the Champ de Mars, in the shadow of Napoleon's tomb, a great military ceremony is taking place. The camera pans past the cheering masses, past the assembled soldiery, past the inner circle of generals, and brings us at last to the very center, to the spot where two humble men are being decorated with the highest honor France can bestow. And our eyes light up with pleasure as we recognize one of them, for he is our old friend, the long-suffering Paul Lavond. But the other man we do not know, and only at the very close of the film, when he is presented with his award, do we learn from the heroic words of the *Président de la République* that this great personage is the inventor of Flit.

## Readers Write

### Story Situation

To the Editor:

Needless to say, your own good periodical contains the most stimulating cinematic writings that come to my desk, and among the comments in the last issue that particularly hit home were the ones on the story situation. I'm just as mystified as you are over the screen story system. An agent here who does a lot of business with the picture companies on stories and with whom I discussed the matter at length, said the Hollywood scenario editors don't want *story ideas*, but author *names*. In other words, they'd rather take the most trite plot from a "famous" writer than an unusually good story from an unknown.

You saw how they grabbed up Clifford Odets and Irwin Shaw though neither one has written a thing with *popular* appeal. Studios sign these "personalities" at \$2,000 a week or more just to prevent other studios from signing them. Then the scouts brag to their bosses about having bagged the "famous so-and-so playwright". But what do they get in tangible value?

Another time I talked things over with a big producer's story department here. They needed a story for a certain star. I had a grand idea, which I outlined. They said, great, put it on paper and let's have it. I did. They thought it was a honey, and sent the usual report to the coast. Nothing happened. I let some others see the story (a grand thing for Eddie Cantor, Harold Lloyd, Joe E. Brown or Bing Crosby), and they all raved about it. But the agent to whom I gave it told me he had little hopes of a sale—despite its undoubted merits—because I had no "name" as a writer. So I said, all right, next fall a play of mine will be presented on Broadway. Then I'll be a name, and then the film companies will be offering me small fortunes for the stuff they don't want now. It's still the name stuff. So what are the scenario departments buying?

Excuse me for taking up this much of your time, but after reading your article on stories—and recalling an-

★ ★ ★

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other item about an experience you had with a story of your own—I thought this off the record stuff might interest you a bit.—R. H. C., New York.

### Gregory LaCava's Record

To the Editor:

I saw a note in the August 15th issue of the SPECTATOR, expressing pleasant surprise that Gregory LaCava has such a grand flair for smart comedy. In 1922, or thereabouts, Greg was a director of two-reel comedies for Charlie Burr, and directed many of the then famous "Torchy" two-reelers.

As a footnote to screen history, Charlie Burr has seen quite a few prominent people of the industry go through his hopper. Bill Lackey, the Paramount producer, was among these. Also Dick Thorpe, then "shorts" director; and last but not least, Norma Shearer appeared in bit parts in Charlie's pictures long before she became the great star she is.—B. M., Hollywood.

### Substantial Recognition

To the Editor:

Some time ago, when asked to advertise in your next Quarterly Number, I told you I did not believe in advertising by those in the creative branches of picture production. I have not changed my mind, but you may insert my advertisement in each of the next four quarterly numbers. Contracting for a page to be used the next year is a small price to pay for the satisfaction I derived from

- Hamilton
- MacFadden

- Writer
- Director

reading your courageous and convincing criticism of Twentieth Century-Fox's despicable action in making a motion picture of the Barrymore-Elaine Barrie episode. I feel it my duty to support such a publication.

If immediate payment would be of any help to you, you may send me a bill for all four advertisements.—(Signature omitted for obvious reasons).

(One of a shower of verbal and written expressions of appreciation of the SPECTATOR's comments in a recent issue on the bad taste displayed by the producers of *Sing, Baby, Sing*. We confess, however, that the above gave us the greatest satisfaction. It has a tangible quality that appeals to our baser nature.—W. B.)

### Tasmania Reader Reports

To the Editor:

It is fine to be getting the SPECTATOR again. Like all your other readers, I think you let your enthusiasm for silent technic obscure your appreciation of the many virtues of pictures. But all the same I thoroughly enjoy reading all you have to say. Especially the fill-up-jokes. I remember your telling us how through your not wearing a hat when shopping you once nearly sold a bed. I know the feeling. I go hatless too, and have often had my browsing in the local bookstores interrupted by customers who wanted their selections wrapped up. Some people apologize when I explain but most of the women just get huffy about the service.—L. Morrisby, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

### Another Talented Family

To the Editor: :

The amazing Breneiser family of Santa Maria with their six exceptional children, about whom you wrote in one of your recent issues, reminded me of "Sanger's Circus"—the well known Braggiotti family. I do not know whether you are acquainted with them through Margaret Kennedy's books, *The Constant Nymph* and *The Fool of the Family*, but the two families have striking similarities of genius.

The Sanger children were delightful "purists," combatting life with seriousness and art, behind which was their charm of individual high spirit. They were children not seeking to find themselves—they had already done so. Each one's particular medium of expression had



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the respect and encouragement of the others. It is this similarity, a commonly possessed factor of both Sangers and Breneisers, that seems to have fostered the home commune for artistic achievement.

It is only because these two unique families are consistently alike in their versatility and because they are the only two ever brought to my attention, that I thought that you, too, might be interested.

It was pleasant, as well as inspirational to meet them through the SPECTATOR.—K. K., Hollywood.

### She is for Peace

To the Editor:

More power to you for your splendid editorial challenging the motion picture producers in Hollywood for not making more peace pictures. But alas, this group are not socially minded. I have a high regard for you because you have sensibilities, and character and, last but not least, moral courage, the three things most of the Americans seem to have lost. To quote from Woodrow Wilson, "The test of the character of any people is that peoples' ability to react to the situation in which they find themselves." No, I am sorry to say, the American people have not reacted favorably to the cheap tawdry entertainment from Hollywood, but have accepted its purpose to browbeat and stupify in order that they (the masses) would forget to think on these great questions of state and the world. In all this human struggle I like to feel that God is still at the helm and you are one of his ambassadors and the beauty and satisfaction of the good that we do, Truth will protect us and direct us in these splendid inspiration.—Mrs. Maud Joss, Pasadena, Calif.

### We Are Appreciated

To the Editor:

I find the SPECTATOR valuable in the selection of motion pictures. Our list committee is distributing six hundred copies each month to the public. The lists are well received. Your reviews, editorials and comments are educational and stimulating. We need your courage and independent spirit.—Babara L. Bowman, 16th Dist. Motion Picture Chairman P. T. A., Oakland, Calif.

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*Hollywood*

20  
CENTS

# S P E C T A T O R

Eleventh Year

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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Volume 11

SEPTEMBER 26, 1936

No. 13

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## **Shakespeare vs. Rowland Brown As Screen Writers**

## **Personalities More Important Than Trained Actors**

## **Technicolor Makes Advances As Disturbing Factor**

## **Sol Wurtzel Teaches Wodehouse It's Unsafe To Talk**

*Ramona*

*Polo Joe*

*Craig's Wife*

*Dodsworth*

*Missing Girls*

*Daniel Boone*

*Devil Is A Sissy*

*Accusing Finger*

*The Longest Night*

*Wedding Present*

*Thank You, Jeeves!*

*Girl On Front Page*

*Valiant Is The Word For Carrie*

# Next . . .

## The October Quarterly

THE SPECTATOR which follows this one in two weeks will be one of the Quarterly issues for which we solicit quarter-page advertisements.

•

ALREADY scores of the Spectator's friends have signified their intention of availing themselves of the opportunity to bring their names to the attention of the film world. There are many more from whom we hope to hear. YOU are one of them.

•

THE CHARGE for a quarter-page is thirty-five dollars. A telephone message — Gladstone 5213 — is all the effort necessary for you to make. May we hear from you?





From the

# Editor's Easy Chair



**T**HE boy behind the Universal desk allowed himself just a suspicion of a smile when I told him I had an appointment with the new man in charge of production, Irving Thalberg. "I am Irving Thalberg," he said. Thus I met my first motion picture executive, and a charming boy. We dined together that evening in the Cocomanut Grove. No one hailed him or pointed him out. But last week his death made news that was flashed around the world. The intervening years he had made count greatly in the forward progress of the screen, but never by word or deed did he consciously do anything to attract attention to himself. No one ever saw on the screen "An Irving Thalberg Production," nor is it Producer Irving Thalberg the entire motion picture world still is mourning. It mourns a lovable man who never ceased being a gracious boy. After his life on earth, all he need have said to the Guardian of the Gates was, "I am Irving Thalberg," and the Gates would be thrown wide.

**F**ARTHER along in the interior of this SPECTATOR, in my review of *The Devil Is a Sissy*, (Page 9), I claim there is more true cinema in that Metro picture than in its *Romeo and Juliet*. In case you read the reviews before you turn your attention to the more abstract discussions this department offers, you will notice that on *The Devil's* tail I have hooked an invitation to you to gather around the Easy Chair while we discuss in a leisurely manner the relative merits of the little picture and the big one, a discussion that will embrace points applicable to all pictures. If you have not read the review, it might be a good idea to post yourself on the premise of our argument by turning to page 9 and reading it now. While you are doing so I will fill and light my pipe.

**F**IRST, we must understand what we are talking about. It is the box-office, not screen art. The SPECTATOR is not interested in the screen as an art. It is interested in it as an industry which is not making half as much money as it should, which is blundering its way stupidly with its eyes blind and its mind blank to its vast possibilities as a business. It so happens the business is one of commer-

cializing an art medium, and to even the dullest mind it should be apparent the business must prosper only to the extent the demands of the art are complied with in the manufacture of the product the business offers for sale. So when we mention "screen art" as the discussion proceeds, remember we are not embarked on an abstract argument, that we refer to screen art purely as raw material for a manufactured article of commerce, just as a brick-maker would refer to the clay he uses, or a weaver would regard his wool. As the salability of the weaver's tweeds is determined largely by the purity of his raw material, he finds it is good business to use only yarns made from pure wool. In the same way I believe the film industry can make larger profits if it puts into its product only the principles of screen art.

\* \*

**T**HE screen became great as an industry in the only way any industry can become great: its product was fundamentally sound. As it could not tell its stories by word of mouth, it developed a high degree of proficiency in telling them by a series of pictorial impressions. As it was the only form of dramatic entertainment the audience could follow with its eyes and which did not ask the cooperation of the intellect, it caught the instant fancy of the world. Its appeal was directly to the emotions. When the drunken husband was beating his wife, our intellects did not form the words, "The drunken husband is beating his wife." Our intellects had nothing to do with our emotional reaction to the distressing scene. They were having a rest while we were being entertained by our imaginations. No matter how hard the day at the office had been, we always could get a mental rest in a picture house and at the same time be entertained in a manner that soothed our frayed nerves. As it took form, the screen developed an identity of its own as an individual art that in a remarkably short time created a gigantic worldwide industry. There could be nothing fundamentally unsound in an art form that could accomplish so much.

\* \*

**Y**OU will see, then, there is no more reason why we should be called on to exercise our intellects while viewing a motion picture than there is why a studio executive should use his arms when he is not talking. The appeal of the true motion picture being direct to the emotions of the viewer, and the success of the screen as an industry being founded on that fact, there should be nothing in a picture to compel the participation of the

intellect as a factor in our consideration of it as entertainment. Nor should there be anything that would serve as a distraction. The story should glide by our eyes silently, smoothly, with here and there a few lines of dialogue expressed audibly to expedite its telling, and with continuous undertone of music to give it emotional continuity. Such a picture would be a perfect example of the talkie form. The perfect motion picture, of course, would tell its story entirely in action and without audible dialogue, but such perfection would be commercially unwise by virtue of being so difficult to achieve in the steady flow of product the theatre market demands.

\* \*

**T**HE screen is the simplest method of presenting drama. Hollywood has complicated it beyond all reason. It has injected acting in what is not an acting art. It offers the distraction of color in some of its feature-length pictures. It apes the stage in spite of the fact that its own art and that of the theatre have nothing in common. It has transformed the screen from emotional to intellectual entertainment. Its dialogue is declaimed instead of being delivered in intimate, conversational tones.

\* \*

**T**HIS brings us back to the subject of our present discussion—the relative merits as screen entertainment of *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Devil Is a Sissy*. The Shakespearean drama is a great love story, told in the grandest dialogue man has written; Metro has mounted it magnificently and cast it with players of superlative ability. It is a rare intellectual treat, a splendid thing for the screen to have done. But it is not a motion picture, and will not please the immense audience looking for motion picture entertainment. The elements which give it its intellectual strength serve only to weaken it as a screen offering. Its love story is smothered under the weight of the beauty of its language and the grandeur of its investiture. Its players merely are carriers of its literary charms, dressed-up people on the screen only to read pages of great literature, people aloof from us, as foreign to us as is the manner in which their thoughts are expressed.

\* \*

**L**ET us now consider *The Devil Is a Sissy*. "They used to call me 'Stinky,'" says the Juvenile Court judge to the three youngsters under suspicion of burglary. That is the way you would say it, therefore there is nothing in the speech to distract your attention from what is said and center it on the manner in which it is said. The camera has brought us into the immediate presence of the group; we feel we are part of it. We do not regard the judge and the three boys as actors. Nothing they do or say suggests the actor, therefore we get the full force of whatever emotional values the scene develops. Our intellects are not involved, as nothing is given them to digest. It is uncomplicated entertainment. This scene is typical of all the scenes *The Devil* presents. We take the whole picture to our hearts. We live it. The players speak our language; they are our sort of human beings. When two of the boys stand by the side of what may be the death-bed of the third, our fears join theirs, but we give no heed to the manner in which they reveal their emotions. When Juliet finds Romeo dead, we admire greatly the manner

in which she reacts to it, admire it so greatly, in fact, we do not mourn with her. The appeal of the *Devil* scene is emotional; that of the *Romeo* scene intellectual. And never the twain should meet on the screen if what is offered is aimed at the box-office.

\* \*

**N**O matter what the composition, a photograph can become high art. Visually *Romeo and Juliet* is an exquisite example of the art of photography; it reveals outstanding artistic achievement in set designing; Shakespeare's lines are the finest expression of the art of literature, and Norma Shearer's Juliet is a noteworthy contribution to the art of acting. But what do you call it when all of them are put together? The theatre? Scarcely, when its players are shadows on a screen. Cinema? Not when it ignores every cinematic law. Box-office? Ah, there's the rub! Our talk this morning was to be purely commercial, therefore if *Romeo* proves to be a profitable investment of the two million dollars it cost to make, our talk has been but a bootless bath in a sea of words. But I think if the two million dollars had been spent on ten feature pictures made from stories written by trained screen writers, directed by people who know what motion pictures are, acted by people not spoiled by stage technique—if the two million had been spent that way, I am sure it would prove a much better investment.

\* \*

**B**UT Hollywood always has suffered from the hallucination that it can make pictures out of money, that a picture costing two million dollars must have ten times the entertainment value one costing two hundred thousand possibly could have. Penned in by the walls of each studio is enough screen intelligence to make inexpensive pictures of real box-office strength. Paramount, blindly groping to clutch the prosperity that once was its pride, ignores the picture brains on its pay-roll and pays Clifford Odets a big sum to write in a medium in which he has not had one day's training. Odets is a brilliant writer; he wrote honestly and brilliantly, and Paramount shot what he wrote, the result being the heavy, plodding *The General Died at Dawn*. In selecting Odets, Adolf Zukor displayed precisely the same intelligence he would display if he selected an electrical engineer to decorate his drawing room. Metro pays one hundred thousand dollars for a published story. For that much money it could get twenty stories written in the language of the screen, each of which could be made into a picture which would prove as successful at the box-office as the one made from the hundred-thousand-dollar book.

\* \*

**D**AVE SELZNICK pays a huge sum for *Gone With the Wind*, admittedly a good piece of story property, valuable by virtue of the exploitation the book is getting. For the purchase price he is buying established box-office value, a title that in itself will attract audiences. But instead of putting the book on the screen and offering it as such to the public, he will run true to Hollywood practice and offer a cast for sale. If he relies on the names of his players to make a picture pay, why pay so much for a story to be made into the picture?

**N**OT infrequently of late we have read of Hollywood productions being held up while their producers anxiously are riding the range in the vain hope of locating leading men they can rope. Making sure of a steady supply of raw material is the first law of manufacturers. Any other industry, even approaching the magnitude of the film industry, would know years in advance of its needs just where its raw material was to come from. Motion pictures have had at least thirty years to keep their eyes front and a full supply of leading men always in sight. The present shortage is due to their lack of foresight and the fact that since they went talkie their scouts have been riding the wrong range to replenish the supply. They have been looking for actors when they should have sought personalities. Producers seem incapable of realizing the completeness of the difference between the stage and the screen. They point to stage players, who have been successful on the screen, to support their contention that the stage is the natural recruiting ground for screen talent, yet there is not a producer in the business who would not gladly trade his eye-teeth and hope of preferential treatment in the next world for Robert Taylor's name on a long-term contract. Shirley Temple was last year's box-office champion, a fact that is both a text and a sermon.

\* \*  
**B**ECAUSE an actor has been on the stage, by no means makes it unreasonable to expect him to gain distinction on the screen. Balancing the Bob Taylors, Shirley Temples, Norma Shearers, Janet Gaynors, and others without stage experience, we have Claudette Colbert, Barbara Stanwyck, Margaret Sullavan, Katharine Hepburn and many others who have had it. While this proves stage training is not essential to screen success, with equal force it proves its lack is not a bar to it. The SPECTATOR always has contended the screen is not an acting art, that it is an art of the projection of personality. This would suggest that instead of looking for actors, the screen should look for personalities. As the dominant feature of any person, the most obvious and most readily recognized, is his or her personality, it should not be difficult by diligent search to round up enough raw material to assure the film industry the uninterrupted turning of its wheels for a long time to come. Years before producers gave evidence of realizing the possibilities of Myrna Loy, Bette Davis and Jean Arthur, among others, the SPECTATOR predicted brilliant futures for all of them and in each instance made the prediction after seeing her on the screen for the first time and in a small part. I can recall that in the cases of Myrna and Bette I had a devil of a time finding out what their names were, as neither received screen credit.

\* \*  
**O**N my morning walk a few weeks ago I encountered a potential screen star, another Simone Simon. Fifteen or sixteen years of age, vibrant, her eyes alive with intelligence and promise of decent devilment, a charming smile which revealed good teeth, a body a sculptor would

In the next issue of the Spectator we hope to have the advertisements of those who have made valuable contributions to the screen, producers, writers, directors, players.

be glad to mold, she stood on a corner, her dog in her arms, waiting for a clear passage across the street. As I was bound in the same direction, I walked along with her, a liberty I claim is mine by virtue of the possession of a head of grey hair, and was fascinated by the young miss. A few years ago I would have got excited about it, secured her name and address and telephoned people in studios about her. But I have given that up. The girl has had no stage experience, I would be told. She has absolutely everything she needs to charm a screen audience, and two or three more years for development by screen experience, yet the brilliant talent scouts could not detect her promise until they saw it across footlights, the trademark of an art unrelated to the one she could serve so well. The other day a young fellow came into the SPECTATOR office. Stalwart, fine looking, young, the range of radiation of his personality seemed to extend several feet in front of him. I could feel it before he spoke. Speirs Ruskell, he said his name was, twenty-one, Irish, just from Dublin, some dramatic experience over there, wanted to advertise that he wanted to get into pictures. It all came out with a cheerful grin and in that finest of all English, that which distinguishes a man with a Dublin education.

\* \*  
**I** COULD get along much better with my writing this morning if there were not so many distractions. In the tree under which I sit, a large and very talkative convention is being held by hundreds of quite small birds, smart little things that dart about importantly and keep up a constant chattering. Across the lawn, at the edge of which the tree stands, an exceedingly large family of quail struts with dignity, its members, between pecks at edible morsels hidden in the grass, exchanging intimate remarks in low, guttural tones. Beautiful birds. If they do not go soon, I will splutter at them, and get back to Speirs Ruskell.

\* \*  
**A**NYONE talking with this young Irishman could tell at the end of the first minute that a year or two devoted to acquiring ease in front of the camera, and a well planned publicity build-up, would result in his becoming an outstanding box-office asset. If he lacks anything that makes for screen success, then I was wrong when I predicted futures for Myrna Loy, Bette Davis and Jean Arthur. I am aware all the studios have junior stock companies, or whatever they call them—groups of young people whom they are teaching to become actors. They are taught how to enter a room, cross it, sit down, get up, and things of that sort. I do not know how my young girl friend would perform such actions, but I do know any attempt to teach her how to perform them would be a crime. Her asset is her personality, the thing about her to make her a box-office attraction, and if she must express it by toeing-in or crossing a room on her hands and knees, she should be allowed to do it that way. The same thing goes for Ruskell. Personality embraces everything a person has. If Ruskell crosses a room like no one else, his manner of doing it is one of the things making up his personality, the sum total of all of them being the thing he offers for sale to the film industry—personality. Teaching him parlor tricks unlike those he

would perform without teaching, would result only in lessening the value of what he has for sale.

\* \*  
**M**Y attention has been fluttering away this morning on the tails of disappearing birds. I sit so quietly the humming birds regard me as part of the garden furniture. I think the one who just now threw out his clutch over my right shoulder and is staying up there, his engine still running, is interested in what I am writing in this paragraph. The distractions have been so attractive, I forget exactly what I had in mind to write when I began my morning task, but I think it was something about the studios had better forget actors as leading men and hunt up personalities.

## Reviews of Previews

### Pro and Con of Color

RAMONA, 20th-Fox release of Sol M. Wurtzel production. John Stone associate producer; features Loretta Young, Don Ameche, Kent Taylor, Pauline Frederick, Jane Darwell, Katherine de Mille; directed by Henry King; screen play by Lamar Trotti; from novel by Helen Hunt Jackson; musical score by Alfred Newman; songs by William Kernell; technicolor photographed by William V. Skall; technicolor director, Natalie Kalmus; art direction, Duncan Cramer; assistant director, Robert Webb; film editor, Al De Gaetano; Costumes, Gwen Wakeling. Supporting cast: Victor Kilian, John Caradine, J. Carrol Naish, Pedro de Cardoba, Charles Waldron, Claire Du Brey, Russell Simpson, William Benedict, Robert Spindola, Chief Thunder Cloud. Running time; 90 minutes.

**T**ECHNICOLOR scores another triumph. There are some shots of breath-taking beauty in *Ramona*, animated landscapes gorgeously painted by the extraordinary color camera. The colors are fresher, richer than we find even on the canvases of the Old Masters, the composition more clearly defined, and when it is brought to life by moving characters, when sheep nibble their way across a meadow, carrying a woolly cloud on their backs; or a field of grain bends its golden head in obeisance to a passing breeze, the screen gives us something we can get from no other member of the family of arts. An outdoor religious service which follows Father Gaspara's arrival at the Moreno hacienda, is a thing of such beauty in composition, coloring, and sound reproduction that it stirs the beholder's emotions. Certainly praise is due the chemists and technicians who brought the Technicolor process to such a high degree of perfection.

Under the stiff competition of its artistic coloring, the story of *Ramona* struggles manfully to gain recognition on its own account. Henry King's sensitive, sympathetic and intelligent direction never was more in evidence in any of the long list of masterpieces he has contributed to the glory of screen history, but, in spite of him, *Ramona* comes to the screen much as a sincere art creation that is dwarfed by the glory of its frame.

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**A**MOTION picture gains its entertainment value from the degree in which its story holds our interest, by the degree in which it sustains our sympathy for the characters whose affairs it deals with. The story of *Ramona* is a tender, beautiful romance which closes on a

note of tragedy; it contains all the elements to keep us stirred emotionally, but throughout its length it does not succeed in keeping our attention, our emotional reaction, from shifting from its own beauty to the beauty of its frame.

I refer above to the emotional response we give the religious ceremony. The ceremony has no direct bearing on the story, and serves only to dissipate whatever emotional continuity the story had developed prior to its appearance.

If in the production of the picture, Darryl Zanuck's purpose was to show us what vast strides in color photography Technicolor has made, then *Ramona* may be accepted as a completely successful venture; but if his purpose was to stir our emotions by enlisting our interest in a group of people and making us share their joys and sorrows, we can not regard as successful a venture in which one element competes with another in an effort to hold our attention. Beauty on the screen has box-office value only when it is a modest background of the human narrative which gains and holds unbroken our emotional reaction. In *Ramona*, what should be the modest background steps to the foreground and commands our attention on its own account.

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**B**UT *Ramona* is a subject that lends itself to color treatment," a member of Zanuck's staff said to me after the preview. No feature-length picture lends itself to color treatment and particularly one with the picturesque setting of *Ramona*. It might be possible to put so much machine-gun firing and so many murders in a gangster picture that we would become excited past the point of being conscious of color treatment. Bloody doings and esthetic beauty are so far apart in their elements of appeal that our attention naturally would be attracted to the one creating the greater excitement.

But with a poetic romance like that of *Ramona*, one set in the hills of California when the dominant note of life was Spanish glamor, when colorfully attired senoritas flirted demurely with gay caballeros, the effort of the producer hoping to make his picture successful at the box-office by virtue of the strength of the story, should be devoted to resisting the temptation to develop all the pictorial possibilities of the locale. Only black and white photography would preserve the relative value of story and locale.

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**I**N a gangster picture the physical story dominates and there is no room for sufficient esthetic values to challenge its domination. Color photography, therefore, could not check the forward flow of the filmic motion in such a picture. In *Ramona* esthetic possibilities lie in both the story and the locale. They appeal to similar emotions, our love of beauty being closely akin to our love of romance. Either needs but little encouragement to dominate the other. In the picture the color treatment dominates the story, and it is from the story, not from the photography, that a screen production must get its box-office values. Instead, therefore, of lending itself to color treatment, *Ramona* is exactly the kind of story that should be shot in black and white. Any student of motion picture appreciation in one of the many educational in-

stitutions on the SPECTATOR's subscription list, could have reasoned out that for Darryl Zanuck.

But as entertainment, *Ramona* is not devoid of values. Any picture Henry King directs is worth seeing. Shot in black and white, scene for scene, with the same dialogue and cast, it would have been a romantic gem with an ending which would have reduced an audience to tears. My emotions always are ready to go on shift at the slightest suggestion, but as I viewed *Ramona* the beauty of its scenes lessened their appeal to my emotional appreciation of the human element. I kept wondering why Zanuck spent an additional one hundred and fifty thousand dollars to make me admire physical beauty and deny myself the pleasure of a damned good cry.

## Columbia Gem of the Notion

**CRAIG'S WIFE**, Columbia Pictures Corporation. Screen play, Mary C. McCall, Jr.; from the play by George Kelly; director, Dorothy Arzner; assistant director, Arthur S. Black; photographer, Lucien Ballard, A. S. C.; sound engineer, Lodge Cunningham; film editor, Viola Lawrence; art director, Stephen Goosson; musical director, Morris Stoloff; costumes, Lon Anthony. Cast: Rosalind Russell, John Boles, Billie Burke, Jane Darwell, Dorothy Wilson, Alma Kruger, Thomas Mitchell, Raymond Walburn Elizabeth Risdon, Robert Allen, Nydia Westman, Kathlen Burke.

**COLUMBIA** has given in *Craig's Wife* a dramatic gem of the social problem type, perhaps the best of those which conform to the notion that such problems worked out entirely in dialogue can be sold to the public at a profit. Edward Chodorov, of Columbia's production staff, saw to it that the picture was mounted handsomely, Mary C. McCall, Jr. cleverly constructed a screen play which does full justice to its source, George Kelly's play of the same name; Dorothy Arzner gave it direction so brilliant that one wonders why her name has been absent so long from the screen, and all members of the cast give excellent performances.

The play is a discussion of an abstract social problem made concrete by its application to a specific group of people. Rosalind Russell marries John Boles for the home he can give her, and rules both the home and him with cold relentlessness which chills the home and drives her husband's friends away from him. The theme makes the settings of more than ordinary story value, and Stephen Goosson designed them in a manner that makes them a big contribution to the picture. So well does Miss Russell develop her characterization, so unpopular with the audience does she make the character, that when Boles at last wakes up and smashes one of her cherished vases, the large preview audience actually cheered. That is a warm tribute to the coldness of the performance and the brilliance of the direction.

**AND** still *Craig's Wife* is not box-office. It is a photographed play, not a motion picture, and motion picture audiences will not be satisfied with it. Nor was the theatre audience altogether satisfied with the play. It was awarded the Pulitzer prize, but was not an outstanding box-office success. As the picture tells the story entirely in dialogue, it becomes merely a photograph of a rearranged version of the play, its appeal being solely to the intellect and not primarily to the emotions as motion

pictures must appeal if they are to give universal satisfaction. (In the *Easy Chair*, page 3, I go at some length into the question of intellectual and emotional appeal.)

But while *Craig's Wife* will not please the many, it certainly will please the few discriminating ones who are willing to accept the stage as it is presented on motion picture screens. Rosalind Russell's performance is by long odds the best she has given the screen, being a quite remarkable characterization of a well bred shrew. John Boles is excellent in both phases of his role—first as the husband too blinded by love to see his wife's shortcomings, and then as the outraged husband when at last he realizes them. Dorothy Wilson again shows what a splendid little actress she is, one of the best of her kind on the screen. Alma Kruger, Billie Burke, Jane Darwell and Nydia Westman also do splendidly.

## Universal's Poor One

**THE GIRL ON THE FRONT PAGE**, Universal production and release. Charles R. Rogers, executive producer; directed by Harry Beaumont; associate producer, Robert Presnell; screen play by Austin Parker, Albert R. Perkins and Alice D. G. Miller; original story by Roy and Marjorie Chanslor; photography by Milton Krasner; art director, Jack Otterson; film editor, Philip Cahn; musical director, Herman Heller; special effects by John P. Fulton; sound supervisor, Homer G. Tasker. Cast: Edmund Lowe, Gloria Stuart, Reginald Owen, Spring Byington, Gilbert Emery, David Oliver, Robert Gleckler, Clifford Jones, Maxine Reiner. Running time, 72 mins.

**WHEN** Charlie Rogers gave us *My Man Godfrey* as the first production to come from the New Universal, he set a standard which his second effort, *The Girl on the Front Page*, lowers abruptly. Perhaps it was a case of too many cooks, as I see no less than five people are credited with having had something to do with the story. It is an exceedingly poor picture, a complete waste of time spent in viewing it.

Harry Beaumont, who directed, can not be blamed for the poor results. He did almost as well as anyone could with the script handed him. The qualifying "almost" is because of a weakness that Harry is by no means alone among directors in committing when they are trying to put some life into a lifeless script. It is the confusing of filmic motion and physical motion—the effort to create the impression the story is moving forward when in reality only the characters are moving. In dialogue scenes in this picture the players do not remain in one position for thirty seconds at a stretch. They get up, sit down, pace hither and yon until our attention is engaged more with what they are doing than with what they are saying.

**I**N scenes in which the story is carried forward by dialogue there should be no unnecessary movement of characters. When a person is telling us something interesting, we want him to sit still and tell it, not to hop all over the place like a flea with the hives.

That is the one sin to be charged to the direction. The many others are attributable to the script. Edmund Lowe and Gloria Stuart argue interminably over whether a certain story is or is not to be published in the newspaper owned by Gloria and edited by Eddie, when the fact of its publication or omission is all that has story interest.

Lowe's characterization is one of those which irritate an audience by virtue of being unnecessarily churlish. There is one story incident that will cause newspapermen to shudder. An experienced girl is assigned to cover a murder story, and because she goes to sleep her paper is the only one in town to make no mention of the murder next morning! Apparently the editor forgot there was a murder as soon as he told the girl to cover it. That gives you a good idea of the manner in which the story is constructed.

## Writer Has His Day

**MISSING GIRLS.** Chesterfield picture produced by George R. Batcheller. Directed by Phil Rosen; original story and screen play by Martin Mooney; photography by M. A. Anderson; recording engineer, Richard Tyler; art director, Edward Jewell. Cast: Roger Pryor, Noel Madison, Sidney Blackmer, Muriel Evans, Ann Doran, Wallis Clark, Dewey Robinson, Oscar Apfel, Robert Fiske, Frank Sheridan, Maurice Black, Edward Keeane, Cornelius Keefe, George Cooper, Warner Richmond, Al Hill, John Dilson, Matty Fain, Pat West. Running time; 66 minutes.

**G**EORGE BATCHELLER president of Chesterfield Pictures and producer of *Missing Girls*, seems to know how to go about getting a picture that will rate high in entertainment qualities. He allows the writer who conceives the story to see that it gets on the screen just as he conceived it.

Martin Mooney wrote the original story; he wrote the script; he was given a good director, and he followed the thing through to the end. Phil Rosen put Mooney's mental picture on the screen, and the result is that in *Missing Girls* we have the most expertly told story I can remember having seen. If it were a big picture, turned out by one of the major producers, with a cast of imposing names and shown in the biggest houses, it is possible it might have marked the dawning of an era distinguished for the fidelity with which the conceptions of authors reached the public.

Mooney's long training as a newspaperman is in evidence throughout the film. He wrote the script as he would write a newspaper story, scorning non-essentials, sticking to the facts and making them follow one another in quick succession. With him the story was the thing, and the result is a tense drama that would hold the close attention of an audience in any house. I was one of a few score reviewers and picture people who viewed the production in a projection room, and not once did I detect a single movement in the little audience that would signify even an instant's lessening in interest.

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**O**NE thing Mooney has learned during his brief picture experience is the importance of the camera as the story-telling medium. He does not tell in dialogue anything the camera can record, nor does he tell in either dialogue or pictures anything that can be left to the imagination of the audience, thereby displaying regard for one of the important cinematic laws. When he wishes to inform us that one of the missing girls is alone and without money in New York, he lets us see her climbing a flight of stairs and finding the door of her room locked. Her back is to the camera during the entire scene. We know how she would feel, can imagine the grief her face

must be revealing, and he fades out on her back and shifts our attention immediately to the next matter of importance. So it goes throughout the entire film, which moves swiftly without ever becoming choppy.

In many pictures quick cutting produces a choppy effect, not by virtue of the mechanical process of cutting, but because of its too rapid shifting of the attention of the audience from one story point to another. In *Missing Girls*, the scenes come in their logical order, blend into a smoothly running narrative without suggestion of undue speed in its forward progress. The scenes shift quickly, but the continuity of our interest in the story is kept intact.

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**A** **WEAKNESS** of the present production methods is the importance attached to the writers who supply the scripts. Several stories I have written under various names have been made into pictures, but not in one instance has a picture presented my story as I conceived it. Good or bad as a story might be, the thing the studio bought was not the thing the producer sold to the public. Every writer of original screen stories has the same complaint. All of them will envy Mooney for the opportunity George Batcheller gave him to tell his story on the screen as he himself saw it in his mind. There are plenty of other writers who could do the same thing, and the day is not far distant when they will be allowed to do so. If big producers will have a look at *Missing Girls*, they may learn the wisdom of allowing writers to follow through.

Rosen's direction is in every way satisfactory. He, as well as Mooney, obviously deemed the only matter of importance was telling the story without wasting any of the viewers' time. For all that the picture is sprinkled generously with gangsters, there are no outbursts of histrionic pyrotechnics, no loud talking, no heaving bosoms or bared teeth. The performances, like the scenes, blend into one another until we are aware only of the whole acting pattern and not of the individual contributions to it. That means excellent direction.

## Made By Great Direction

**DODSWORTH,** Samuel Goldwyn production for United Artists release. Merritt Hulburd, associate producer; features Walter Huston, Ruth Chatterton, Paul Lukas, Mary Astor, David Niven; directed by William Wyler; screen play by Sidney Howard; from novel by Sinclair Lewis; art director, Richard Day; musical director, Alfred Newman; costumes, Omar Kiam; camera, Rudolph Mate; film editor, Daniel Mandell; assistant director, Eddie Bernoudy. Supporting cast: Gregory Gaye, Mme. Marie Ouspenskaya, Odette Myrtil, Kathryn Marlowe, John Poyne, Spring Byington, Harlan Briggs. Running time, 90 mins.

**W**HEN we estimate the values of the various contributions to *Dodsworth*, we find it is the director's picture. We have had complete and elaborate productions before, well written screen plays and thoroughly competent performances, but extremely rarely have we had them blended with the skill displayed by William Wyler in his direction of the Sinclair Lewis story. It is a beautiful job, one that finally establishes young Wyler's right to recognition as one of Hollywood's really great directors.

Although I have not seen Willie Wyler for three or four years, my ego is inflated a little more by each step



he takes in his forward progress. As I stated in my review of his *These Three*, something he directed when he was a mere boy gave me the impression that some day he would be a director of distinction, an opinion I recorded in the SPECTATOR at the time, thus constituting myself his original discoverer. The feeling of proprietorship is so strong within me, I am inclined to bow when I hear him praised.

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**WHAT** Wyler learned when the screen was silent is evidenced in his technique to-day. He attaches importance to the camera and displays intelligence in its use. In every Dodsworth scene there is story value in the composition. When the story is being advanced by dialogue, when what the characters are saying is more important than what they are doing, all of them are included in the shot, thus holding the scene as a sustained pictorial unit without any of that hopping about from one unnecessary close-up to another. This treatment adds value to such close-ups as are necessary in other sequences. In his grouping of characters in their relation to the settings, Wyler obtains striking compositions which Rudolph Mate's camera brings to the screen as beautiful examples of the art of photography. As something to look at, *Dodsworth* is a joy.

In its human aspects it is an offering of dignity and compelling power to provide you with a treat you rarely can experience in a motion picture house. Wyler does not entertain us with actors playing parts. He shows us a group of quite ordinary human beings, doing things natural for them to do and unaware that we are watching them. The excellence of the performances is the greatest tribute to the excellence of the direction. Never have Walter Huston, Ruth Chatterton and Mary Astor appeared to better advantages—in fact, never have Ruth and Mary given us anything approaching their understanding characterizations in this picture.

Paul Lukas comes back to us in *Dodsworth* after too long an absence from the screen. He is a player we can not see too often. David Niven and Gregory Gaye are two others who strike a satisfactory masculine note. A brief bit is made into a big scene by the outstanding artistry of Maria Ouspenskaya. As a married couple with staunch convictions, Spring Byington and Harlan Briggs do splendidly.

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**THERE** is one brief scene in *Dodsworth* that is a cinematic gem. John Payne, a youth I never saw before, married Kathryn Marlowe, Huston's daughter. The scene I refer to shows Payne coming into the hospital room and seeing his son for the first time—about a minute of it altogether, but an example of inspired direction and acting. Payne does not know what to do with his hands; he wants to touch the baby, and is afraid to. The scene strikes a human note, powerful in its simplicity.

Some music by Alfred Newman is scattered through the production. It is rather strange that a production reflecting so much screen intelligence in all other respects, should reflect a total lack of it in its musical treatment. It is ludicrous to have spots of music in a motion picture, but before producers learn why, they will have to take a course in motion picture elementals.

To Samuel Goldwyn and Merritt Hulburd, though, must go credit for one of the season's greatest pictures. Sam paid \$160,000 for the rights to the story. To justify the investment a great picture had to be made from it, and Sam saw that such a picture was made.

## Is Warmly Human

**THE DEVIL IS A SISSY**, Metro production and release. W. S. Van Dyke production; produced by Frank Davis; stars, Freddie Bartholomew, Jackie Cooper, Mickey Rooney; features Ian Hunter, Peggy Conklin, Katherine Alexander; screen play by John Lee Mahin and Richard Schayer; story by Rowland Brown; musical score, Herbert Stothart; song and lyric by Arthur Freed and Nacio Herb Brown; photographed by Harold Rosson and George Schneidermann; assistant director, Al Raboch. Supporting cast: Gene Lockhart, Kathleen Lockhart, Jonathan Hale, Etienne Girardot, Sherwood Bailey, Buster Slavin, Grant Mitchell, Harold Huber, Stanley Fields, Frank Puglia, Etta McDaniels. Running time; 92 minutes.

**METRO** first gave us *Old Hutch*, a homespun story in a homespun setting, and now it adds *The Devil Is a Sissy*, another down-to-earth offering. If the public could be made to believe how much real entertainment is packed into these two pictures, each of them could earn a bigger box-office response than Metro's *Romeo and Juliet*. Wallace Berry's name will attract a certain degree of adult patronage to *Old Hutch*, but I am afraid when grown-ups read that the three leading parts in the other are played by children, they will regard it as entertainment for little people only, the result being that they will deny themselves a cinematic treat; the box-office will suffer accordingly and Hollywood will conclude it is better business to stick to productions smeared with lipstick and smelling of talcum powder.

Still, if Ronnie Colman, Warner Baxter, Gary Cooper, or any trio of adult actors, see *The Devil Is a Sissy*, they no doubt would be satisfied if they could contribute to a picture in which they were teamed three such superlative performances as the three youngsters contribute to the Metro offering. Mickey Rooney, Freddie Bartholomew, and Jackie Cooper ask no concessions because of their youth. No adult player of either sex ever has given us an emotional scene that outranks for sheer artistry and power that of Rooney when a clock strikes the hour of his father's electrocution at Sing Sing. Mickey shed no tears, but the preview audience did. And next morning, when Mickey boasts of how hard his father was to kill, then for a moment realizes the horror of it, quickly followed by an attempt to parade his manhood by whistling a tune, the audience shed more tears.

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**BUT** *The Devil Is a Sissy* is not a doleful picture. On the whole it is rather a gay one, and it appeals to us because, after all, it mainly is about you and me when we were kids. I never had a hideout in an automobile junk yard, my birth so long preceding that of automobiles, but there was a dandy cave down by the creek where we kids foregathered to lie about the things we had done and boast of those we were going to do. And when the youngsters foregathered in their junk yard hideout, I went back through the years and smelled again the musty odor of the damp cave by the creek. That is why I say the pic-

ture is about me. And there are plenty of incidents in it about you.

Rowland Brown's story was made into a meritorious screen play by John Lee Mahin and Richard Schayer. W. S. Van Dyke's direction is another example of his versatility. No matter what the theme, story or cast, Woody Van Dyke always manages to give us an entertaining picture. In this one he displays a rare grasp of child psychology and his direction gives us the impression that at some time in his career he must have been a boy. But I suppose if he made a picture dealing solely with burglars, we would get the impression that only a burglar would do it so well.

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**T**HE adult performances are molded by Van Dyke's direction into harmonious pieces of an entertaining whole. There is no acting. We have just a group of human beings involved in the affairs of the three boys, and doing the things we would expect them to do. It is this lack of histrionics that makes the picture sincere, authentic. Ian Hunter, always ingratiating and believable, plays opposite Peggy Conklin, a charming, intelligent young woman. Gene and Kathleen Lockhart play the parents of Cooper. Kathleen is not given opportunities to be more than just the anxious mother, but Gene, as the domineering, ignorant and boasting father, presents us with a remarkably skilful characterization, which increases my desire to see him in a role which exactly matches his personality.

One of the most interesting and illuminating sequences in the picture takes us into the Juvenile Court, Jonathan Hale playing the judge. It is a sequence which in itself makes the production a valuable social document, one that brings to us vividly some knowledge of the great service to society being done by that part of the law's machinery. Hale's performance is one of the outstanding features of the picture.

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**I**F all the juvenile courts are as human as Hale makes this one, they must be leading a lot of boys in the right direction. A sample of the dialogue, Hale, as the judge, speaking to Jackie Cooper, before the court on suspicion of burglary: "What's your name?" "James." "No, that's not what I want. What do the kids call you?" "Buck." "Buck—that's a good name." The judge strokes his chin reflectively. "They used to call me 'Stinky.' Once I put some smelly stuff on my hair. Never lived it down." Thus the picture shows us how boys enter the court as miscreants and leave it as friends of the judge. And there is more essence of real cinema in the dialogue I quote than in all the lines Shakespeare wrote.

Dorothy Peterson for some reason not mentioned in the credits on the screen, is warmly sympathetic as Rooney's mother, and Katherine Alexander plays with impressiveness the mother of Bartholomew. To Frank Davis, producer, goes praise for an excellent job of supervision. I can not recall having seen his name on the screen before, and if this is his initial bow as producer we can expect from him some notable contributions to screen entertainment. The camera work of Harold Rosson and George Schneidermann does full justice to the pictorial possibilities provided by the excellent mounting

Metro has given the production.

In the first paragraph of these comments I state *The Devil Is a Sissy* has inherent entertainment value sufficient to make it do better at the box-office than *Romeo and Juliet*. Let us go back to the Easy Chair on page 3, light our pipes and argue that contention at greater length.

## Thank You, Sol

THANK YOU, JEEVES! 20th-Fox release of Sol M. Wurtzel production. Directed by Arthur Greville Collins; screen play by Joseph Hoffman and Stephen Gross; based on story by P. G. Wodehouse; photographed by Barney McGill; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Arthur Treacher, Virginia Field, David Niven, Lester Matthews, Colin Tapley, John Graham Spacey, Ernie Stanton, Gene Reynolds, Douglas Walton, Willie Best. Running time; 56 minutes.

**H**OLLYWOOD is avenged! You will remember the incident of the English humorist, P. G. Wodehouse and his two-thousand-a-week salary for doing nothing for a year on the Metro lot. Unaware there was nothing unusual about a little thing like that, Wodehouse thought it was a bit of humor which, considering how handsomely he had been paid for experiencing it, he could afford to dispose of for nothing. He gave it to the papers. Much was made of it, and Hollywood has been sore at Wodehouse ever since, even though he is back on the Metro pay-roll to recuperate after quite a long spell of work in England. Apparently Wodehouse and Metro are willing to let by-gones be by-gones—but not Sol Wurtzel. Alone and unaided he figured out a diabolical plan for wreaking revenge on the talkative Englishman.

Twentieth Century having purchased some of Wodehouse's *Jeeves* stories, Sol used the name in a picture the story for which is credited as being "based on a story by P. G. Wodehouse." The Englishman has quite a substantial reputation as a humorist, but if it can stand up under the weight of the kind of picture Sol has made under the title, "*Thank You, Jeeves*," Wodehouse can consider his career has been extraordinarily successful. If he intends to view the picture, I would advise him to take along all his sense of humor. Otherwise he may pull out all his hair and sue Sol. Anyway, when he leaves Hollywood at the end of his present chore, it is dollars to doughnuts he will keep his trap shut when he encounters reporters.

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**J**EEVES, the valet, is known to millions of Americans who read of his exploits in *Saturday Evening Post*. The Wodehouse stories were successful because their readers liked the humor in them. No other magazine has a class of readers that approximates so closely the average motion picture audience. The Wodehouse humor, therefore, would seem to be good screen material. But Sol does not think so. Apparently he feels the *Jeeves* stories were popular because of the velvety quality of the word "Jeeves," for that is all of Wodehouse he has put in the picture. And for the Wodehouse humor he has substituted as laugh provokers a colored saxophone player and a boy who squirts buckshot at people's necks through his teeth. You'd just die laughin'!

Five or six years ago Sol made the first *Charlie Chan* picture. The Chinese detective of Earl Derr Biggers was

one of my favorite light literature characters. The picture disappointed me because the part of Chan was played by a Chinaman who was not on the screen more than three minutes all told—just an incidental character the picture could have done without. I was interested enough to hunt up Sol and ask him why. He told me the American public never would accept a Chinaman as the central figure in a picture, that it wanted only romance and comedy, not the head of a Chinese family working out baffling crime problems.

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**N**OT long after that, the Major-General in command my Scouts on the Fox lot, informed me that exhausted runners were bringing in reports about the devil being to pay over the next *Chan* picture. A play producer had come from New York to direct it, and he had the nutty notion that Chan should be the central character, as the stories had been about him and not about romance and comedy. Seeping through the lines were rumors of stiff battles between Sol and the New York nut, whose name, I found out when I viewed the picture, was Hamilton MacFadden. He finally wore Sol down to acceptance of the story idea, but Sol soared again when Ham selected Warner Oland to be Chan. An established heavy to play a lead? An American talking Chinese dialect? A detective the hero?

My scouts never did find out how Ham managed it, but he had his way and the money-making Chan series had its beginning. Its success has been due to the fact that the pictures contain everything Sol said the public would not accept. Now he says it will not accept a series with a valet as the central character and the Wodehouse humor its dominant quality. The story of *Thank You, Jeeves*, looks as if it had been written without Jeeves in it and that later he had been stuck on it from the outside. The success of the *Chan* series could be duplicated by a *Jeeves* series. Producers are overlooking a good bet in not looking for characters around whom successions of pictures could be written. Wodehouse's valet is an ideal choice for a series, if he can live down the pitiful thing in which he is presented first.

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**T**HANK You *Jeeves* has everything in it. Its locale is England. It has secret plans, gangsters, dreadful fellows who scowl; a worthy young man who is locked in a garage and is too dumb to shout for help; a distressed heroine who flees to and from the hero's house in the dead of a rainy night; panels which open for villains to pass through; a wild auto ride by way of a chase sequence, and, I remind you, the colored saxophone player and the boy who squirts buckshot at people's necks through his teeth. By that time the producer's memory must have been exhausted. That can be the only explanation of the absence of a mortgage on the old homestead and the heroine lashed to the tracks just before the Midnight Express would come thundering through on its mad dash to the Big City.

And that, my brothers, is offered as something coming from the humorous brain of Pelham Grenville Wodehouse. He will talk, will he?

## Muscular Criticism

**VALIANT IS THE WORD FOR CARRIE**, Paramount release of Wesley Ruggles production. Directed by Wesley Ruggles; screen play by Claude Binyon; from the novel by Barry Benefield; art directors, Hans Dreier and Ernst Fegte; film editor, Otho Lovering; photographed by Leo Tovar; musical direction, Boris Morros; original music by Frederick Hollander. Cast: Gladys George, Arline Judge, John Howard, Dudley Digges, Harry Carey, Isabel Jewell, Jackie Moran, Charlene Wyatt, John Wray, William Collier, Sr., Hattie McDaniels, Lew Payton, Maude Eburne, Grady Sutton, Janet Young, Adrienne D'Ambricourt, Helen Lowell, Bernard Suss, George F. Hayes, Irving Bacon, Olive Hatch, Nick Lukats. Running time, 110 mins.

**A** MOTION picture appreciation class in a Philadelphia high school wants to know what system I use in estimating the values of a picture. It is not an intellectual process. I do it entirely with the muscles of my legs and jaw. If I sit still during the entire showing of a picture, do not cross and recross my legs or stifle yawns, then I rate the picture a good one and employ my mental faculties only in figuring out why I liked it. On the other hand, if I cross and recross my legs, fidget, yawn, I know the picture is not pleasing me, and on my way home I figure out what was the matter with it.

About three-quarters of the way through *Valiant*, my leg and jaw muscles began to act up, and on thinking it over afterwards I decided there were several reasons for their conduct. There is not enough entertainment in the story to warrant a running time of one hour and fifty minutes. The story opens in the house of a prostitute and ends in a prison. The leading part is played by a stage actress, unskilled in portraying emotions in such an intimate medium as the screen. The girl whom the leading man should marry, marries someone else.

\* \*

**T**HE book which contained all these things had an exceedingly large sale, not by virtue of the things themselves, but owing to the charming literary style in which they were presented. A successful motion picture can not be made by such a simple method as photographing the skeleton of a successful book. It is the flesh of a book, not its bones, that makes it popular. We enjoy a picture to the extent we can project ourselves into it. It is hard for us to find a place for ourselves in a story dealing with a prostitute and two runaway orphan children. We must be pulled into it by the sheer force of the picture's strength in appealing to our emotions.

*Valiant* lacks the necessary emotional appeal. It is a chronological presentation of incidents in the lives of the three central characters, a biographical sketch well directed as such, handsomely mounted by Paramount, beautifully photographed, but without soul enough to justify its length.

\* \*

**O**N The stage Miss George's performance would have been outstanding, but it lacks the intimate appeal necessary to a screen characterization. The finest performance it that of a boy, Jackie Moran, and it is in

In the next issue of the Spectator we hope to have the advertisements of those who have made valuable contributions to the screen, producers, writers, directors, players.

her scenes with him that Miss George is most effective. John Howard, who plays Jackie grown up, does not live up to the promise of the youthful performance. Arline Judge is cast admirably as the grown-up Charlene Wyatt who reveals herself as a talented child.

A pathetic attempt is made to enliven proceedings by the inclusion of a sequence in an automat in which pie throwing is resorted to. Up to this incident the picture has been gaining emotional strength, but the sequence starts the let-down which persists until the end. Reduced to about an hour and a quarter running time it still could be good entertainment. Paramount displays more bravery than wisdom in selecting the book for screening. It reflects good taste in handling a subject censorable in essence, but did not seem quite up to the task of making it into a picture with strong emotional appeal. I do not mean that it is not worth seeing. You may like it. At all events it should interest you as a study in the transference of a book to the screen.

## Merry and Mad

**WEDDING PRESENT**, Paramount release of B. P. Schulberg production. Directed by Richard Wallace; original story by Paul Gallico; photographed by Leon Shamroy; art directors, Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; assistant director, Ray Lissner; film editor, Robert Bischoff. Cast: Joan Bennett, Cary Grant, George Bancroft, Conrad Nagel, Gene Lockhart, William Demarest, Inez Courtney, Edward Brophy, Purnell Pratt, Douglas Wood, George Meeker, John Henry Allen, George Offerman, Jr., Damon Ford, Heine Conklin, Billy Engel, Ray Hanson, Jack Mulhall, Cy Ring, Charles Williams, Marshall Ruth, Eddie Phillips, Allen Fox. Running time; 80 minutes.

**T**HERE is a tide in the affairs of all men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to Shriner Hi-Jinks and Elk Jamborees; a period of man's irresistible impulse to throw off his years, decorate himself with badges and a funny headpiece, and square himself with his conscience by doing most of the things he had lied to his children about having done when he was a boy. I am not aware if Ben Schulberg was too busy to attend Shriner or Elk gatherings this year, or whether he brooded too much over the war that is defacing Spain and the one that is trampling down the lettuce fields of Salinas, or it may be he heard Bob Burns' bazooka once too often, but, anyway, he went completely off his nut when he approached the making of *Wedding Present*, employed an insane scenarist and a crazy director, and gave us the maddest farce of the year.

I warn you that to enjoy the picture as I did, you have to go crazy also and concede that its impossibilities are possible. If you can view it from that angle, you are in for an hour and a quarter of genuine, fast moving fun. The wisest movement on Ben's part was not to cast it with comedians. Joan Bennett and Cary Grant, in the leading parts, take their madness seriously, and that is what makes it funny. Gene Lockhart, as an arch-duke from somewhere in Europe, is a positive delight and makes me wonder how many still unrevealed acting tricks he has up his sleeve. Bill Demarest is extremely funny as a gangster, and George Bancroft, Conrad Nagel, Inez Courtney, Edward Brophy and Purnell Pratt add greatly to the joy of the production. Dick Wallace's direction of Paul Gallico's story is a brilliant bit of work.

An extended review of a picture of this sort is quite impossible. It is too mad for analysis, but it is a class of entertainment the screen could stand in more frequent doses. There is nothing half-way about it; if you do not think it is good, you will think it is awful.

## For the Children's Hour

**DANIEL BOONE**, Radio release of George A. Hirliman production. Associate producer, Leonard Goldstein; directed by David Howard; screen play by Daniel Jarrett from original story by Edgcomb Pinchon; photography by Frank Good; sound recorded by Hal Bumbaugh; film editor Ralph Dixon; musical directors, Hugo Riesenfeld and Arthur Kaye; musical supervisor, Abe Meyer; Songs and lyrics by Jack Stern and Harry Tobias; art director, Frank Sylos; assistant director, George Sherman. Cast: George O'Brien, Heather Angel, John Carradine, Ralph Forbes, Clarence Muse, George Regas, Dickie Jones, Huntley Gordon, Harry Cording, Aggie Heering, Crauford Kent and Keith Kenneth. Running time, 77 minutes.

Reviewed by PAUL JACOBS

**W**ELFORD BEATON has often told me my critical standard is too rigid. Until I saw Daniel Boone I had no idea of what he meant; for to me, a film either fulfilled the prerequisites of cinematic justification or received censure in the ratio of its weaknesses. *Daniel Boone* gave me sudden and forcible proof of Mr. Beaton's contention.

It is evident that George A. Hirliman's new western release was made for the specific purpose of entertaining children. That it unquestionably will fulfill its mission, immediately stamps it as a successful picture. Were it to be judged in terms of pure cinema instead of purpose, this unfair measure would relegate *Daniel Boone* into the trial-and-error catagory. For example.

Daniel Jarrett's translation of Edgcomb Pinchon's original is the exact counterpart, but for one or two novel touches, of every epic western made since films began. The splendor of our forefather's rugged courage as they faced the fearful hardships and dangers of the covered wagon trail, grows somewhat bromidic through the years unless they are vitilized beyond a mere routine.

\* \*

**T**HIS effect of dull sameness might have been easily rectified by the camera. But with the exception of two striking scenes, no attempt was made to utilize the powerful sweep of vast spaces, of the moodful beauty of mass movement, or of the romantic artistry in panoramically shaded photo-etchings. Thus an all-important mood was never genuinely established, and the subsequent reality illusion remained thin, actually, at times, breaking.

Further deadening the illusion, jerkey continuity held the story and filmic movements without rhythm. The one device which might have sustained and even vitiated these weaknesses, the use of a synchronized and mood-building score, was not only forgotten, but worse, music abrupt and untimed was tossed at the audience like sudden bricks of sound.

The fore-going would, in rigid analysis, be justifiable criticism, but I happen to know that David Howard directed this picture for the express purpose of maintaining O'Brien's vast popularity with young America. Mr. Howard will achieve just that—a successful job. For *Daniel Boone* is one arrow-filled, musket-booming

adventure after another.

And no one is better qualified than George O'Brien to typify America's ideal outdoorsman. Powerful, clear-eyed, clean-cut, he has pleased the western fan since his phenomenal success in *The Iron Horse* many years ago.

**H** *HEATHER ANGEL*, the epitome of sweetness, fulfills the feminine promise of romance in gentle contrast to Mr. O'Brien's huge vigor. As the vile snake-in-the-grass, John Carradine is excellent. Never theatrical but always sinister, his characterization of Simon Girty, renegade, is utterly believable. Handsome Ralph Forbes gives us his usual suavely polished performance. Forbes is a consistently fine trouper; I have never seen him do a poor piece of work.

Unfortunately, Clarence Muse was not given a real chance to exploit either his unusual personality or his magnificent voice. Just another of the fine opportunities this film missed. George Regas is seen for the first time in a sympathetic role, and takes full advantage. Competent support was given by Huntly Gordon, Harry Cording, Aggie Herring, Crauford Kent and Keith Kenneth. Old-timers all, each imbues his bit with a verve and realism which does much to sustain the filmy elements with which they worked. Dickie Moor Jones deserves special commendation. He handles a difficult role like a veteran.

In summary, *Daniel Boone* though ribbed with flagrant cinematic errors, is nevertheless lusty, and provides clean and genuine entertainment for small-town consumption and for our great Kid Tradition: the Saturday Matinee. You may prefer a book, but by all means send the kiddies.

## Propaganda With a Punch

**THE ACCUSING FINGER**, Paramount. Produced by A. M. Botsford; directed by James Hogan; assistant director, Fritz Collings; screen play, Madeleine Ruthven, Brian Marlow, John Bright and Robert Tasker; art director, Hans Dreier and Hans Radon; film editor, Chandler House; sound, Charles Hisserich and John Cope; photographed by Henry Sharp, A.S.C.; interior decoration, A. E. Freudeman; musical direction, Boris Morros. Cast: Paul Kelly, Marsha Hunt, Kent Taylor, Robert Cummings, Harry Carey, Bernadene Hayes, Joseph Sawyer, Dewitt Jennings, Russell Hicks, Jonathan Hale, Rollor Lloyd, Paul Fix, Hilda Vaughn, Sam Flint, George Irving, Frederick Burton, Thomas Jackson, Louis Mason.

Reviewed by PAUL JACOBS

**I**F Producer A. M. Botsford keeps this up, I will have to back down in my assured statement that only the law of averages allows Hollywood to make a good picture. Mr. Botsford again turns in a job of which he may be justly proud. *The Accusing Finger* is technically excellent, cinematically sound and dramatically outstanding.

Directed with a splendid sense of cino-dramatic values by James Hogan, this original by Madeleine Ruthven, Brian Marlow, John Bright and Robert Tasker is student fare of the first order. Deeply thematic, and tenacious of plot, a steadily rising tempo is created through adroitly induced filmic rhythm. A direct and unashamed propagandic thrust at capital punishment forms the theme and instigates the *raison d'être*.

Every act and every sentence derives its sustenance from the central theme. Thus there is no extraneous

dialogue and no wasted stage business. Although *The Accusing Finger* is definitely a class B, every producer can learn a most valuable and needed lesson from this unostentatious production.

**A**S *THE* hardened Attorney, Paul Kelly is at times outstanding, although it is evident that he is more at home in the great open spaces. Marsha Hunt does nicely as the girl, her role offering her no opportunity to make herself particularly felt. Kent Taylor, a trouper to the core, handles his third of the triangle with the imbued reality for which he has become a by-word. As for Harry Carey, what but excellence can mark his every effort. Fifteen years before the Kleigs gives a sense of dramatic proportion not to be achieved by any lesser route.

But acting honors go to Robert Cummings for this year's finest bit. Mr. Cummings is star material.

With one exception the support is excellent; a glance at the credits will explain it: from Dewitt Jennings to George Irving, gleam names which have made Hollywood great for the past decade. Joseph Sawyer, unfortunately is miscast as the priest. The perfect gangster or college coach, Mr. Sawyer is unnatural and ill-at-ease. Perhaps his amazing likeness to Spencer Tracy's Father in *San Francisco* suggested the choice.

The *Accusing Finger* is unreservedly recommended. Cinema students please note.

## Crazy, But Clever

**THE LONGEST NIGHT**, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Directed by Errol Taggart; produced by Lucien Hubbard and Samuel Marx; Screen Play by Robert Andrews; from the story "The Whispering Window" by Cortland Fitzsimmons; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Eddie Imazu, Edwin B. Willis; photographed by, Lester White, A.S.C.; film editor, Robert J. Kern; assistant director, Harry Sharock. Cast: Robert Young, Florence Rice, Ted Healy, Julie Haydon, Catharine Doucet, Janet Beecher, Leslie Fenton, Sidney Toler, Paul Stanton, Etienne Girardot, Tommy Bupp, Samuel S. Hinds, Minor Watson, Kitty McHugh, Olin Howland, Gertrude Sutton, John Hyams.

Reviewed by PAUL JACOBS

**O**CCASIONALLY a film is preposterous to the point of being excellent entertainment. Robert Andrews' deliberate humor has made of Courtland Fitzsimmons' original story just such delightful nonsense.

Errol Taggart, catching the mood suggested, brings with whimsical force an unusual counter-play of emotions, each timed to foil its predecessor; thus, Mr. Taggart works his audience to the point of hysteria by having a dead body fall almost into its lap and then completely vitiates this horrible effect by action so outrageously absurd that we realize it is just a movie and that we are in no personal danger at all.

But Mr. Taggart is subtle as well as sly, for no sooner has our collective sigh of relief steamed the wall, than chuckling fiendishly, he deftly gathers up our carelessly discarded fears and again frightened young ladies in the audience seek the protecting arms of their escorts. In other words, *The Longest Night* is just like a night in one of the "Crazy Houses" at the beach.

Doubtless Robert Young as the dashing millionaire, and Florence Rice, his true love, had lots of fun along

with the rest of the cast. When players enjoy their work, it usually shows in the verve with which they approach each scene. Throughout *The Longest Night* is asparkle with the hoydonish fun everyone (except the murdered lady) seems to be having. So although it, at some time or other, breaks almost all cinematic law, it does it so charmingly, and so obviously with a "by your leave," that producers Lucien Hubbard and Samuel Marx will find they have a minor Big Hit. But they probably know it already.

## Comedy From Warners

POLO JOE, Warners production and release. Supervised by Bryan Foy; directed by William McGann; screen play by Peter Milne and Hugh Cummings; photography by L. William O'Connell; art director, Roland Hill; film editor, Clarence Kolster; gowns by Orry-Kelly; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein. Cast: Joe E. Brown, Carold Hughes, Richard "Skeets" Gallagher, Joseph King, Gordon Elliott, Fay Holden, George E. Stone, Olive Tell, David Newell, Milton Kibbee, Frank Orth, John Kelly, Charles Foy. Running time, 62 mins.

Reviewed by ALLAN HERSHOLT

**H**ERE is a picture, apparently manufactured to win laughs, that achieves its purpose. Basically commonplace, fragile, impossible, replete with comedy of universal appeal and devoid of languor, it reveals a story typical of previous ones which have starred its principal player, Joe E. Brown. The narrative, obvious from the start, as a whole moves so briskly and entertainly that while reviewing it one disregards the fact he has viewed it several times before. Peter Milne and Hugh Cummings, authors of the screen play, are deserving of congratulations for the expert manner in which they have wrought the hackneyed situations into a quite diverting little comedy. William McGann has accomplished a generally praiseworthy job of the direction.

A fault of the production is the manner in which parts of the dialogue are delivered. In some scenes, particularly those played between Brown and Fay Holden, lines are shouted. And why? In the instances that I have in mind, the characters never are more than six feet apart, are alone in completely quiet locations, and neither is described as being hard of hearing. There is no apparent reason whatsoever for the loud, forced delivery. Permitting its presence shows poor judgement on the part of the director.

In two sequences, Brown and Miss Holden are presented laughing in an extremely loud fashion and for extreme lengths, causing a great and unentertaining noise. Nothing is said or done to cause so enormous a quantity of laughter. But one explanation can be given for its inclusion: It is there to amuse the audience. The person responsible for the fact that it has a part in the film must be accused of owning a poor sense of humor, and I am sure he now realizes why, if he was present at the preview and heard remarks concerning the very unfunny and nerve-jarring situation.

Apparently the preview spectators found a great deal in the film to delight them. For there were not many quiet moments at the capacity-filled Forum Theatre during the showing, the audience often creating tumultuous laughter.

Brown achieves much success in his role, which certainly was not unexpected. Richard "Skeets" Gallagher has his best opportunity in no short while and takes complete advantage of it, giving a performance which should help considerably again to place him in the group of much-in-demand comedians. Fay Holden, whose work resembles at times that of Alice Brady, is frequently too forced and unamusing to warrant my expressing desire to see her again. Carol Hughes, Joseph King, George E. Stone and Gordon Elliott do what their parts call for with conviction. L. W. O'Connell's photography is good.

## New York Spectacle

By FRED STEIN

New York, September 21.

**A** FINE picture and an exciting one, *The Last of the Mohicans*. The film has taken many liberties with the novel, but these are, with one exception, in keeping with what might be termed cinematic license; they are required by the demands of the medium, and even the most enthusiastic lover of James Fenimore Cooper cannot fairly regret them. There is, however, no excuse for the one exception I have in mind, since in this instance the producers have taken an incident which is quite logical in the book and have replaced it on the screen with a sequence which makes absolutely no sense.

When Major Duncan Heyward and Hawkeye discover that the only way to save Alice from being burned at the stake by the Delawares, will be for Hawkeye to take her place, the Major takes advantage of the fact that the Delawares have never seen the guide at close enough range to know him well, and nobly asserts that he himself is Hawkeye. This statement would seem to be true to the Indians, since at the moment he happens to be dressed in the costume of the guide, while Hawkeye is wearing Heyward's clothes. In order to determine which of the two is really Hawkeye, the Delaware chief, who knows that Hawkeye is the better shot, now calls for a contest.

\* \* \*

**I**N the book Heyward first shoots at an earthen vessel, and his bullet chips the wood of a tree an inch to the side of it. Hawkeye, without taking careful aim, then shatters the pitcher. Heyward and the Indians all claim that this must have been a lucky shot, so Hawkeye now points out a gourd hanging from a branch a hundred yards away and demands that Heyward shoot at this. Heyward shoots, but hits a tree close to the ground. Now Hawkeye takes careful aim and sends his bullet cleanly through the gourd, thereby proving to all that he is really Hawkeye. In the picture, however, all is otherwise. The Major shoots first at the gourd, breaks it and leaves the neck swinging about on the end of the string. At this Hawkeye, nothing daunted, announces that the neck of the bottle is good enough for him, takes aim, and knocks it out of the picture.

The Delaware chief, grunts, his besmeared cohorts grunt, and all agree that the Major is a damned liar.

No one seems to realize that up to this point the shooting contest has proved exactly nothing. The Major, if his chivalry had been a bit more thorough, would have detected the hiatus in the reasoning of the Delawares and would have demanded a shot at another bottle-neck of the same size, for up to the point where the contest was abandoned, the score was only tied and the Indians might very well have burned the wrong man. It was a good thing for all concerned that an error in logic led willy-nilly to the right conclusion. As things turned out, it made no difference anyway, what with Jack Dalton and the U. S. Marine only a few yards off.

*I*T is a truism that the public gets what it wants in pictures, and this causes me to wonder why the long-suffering public in cities like New York does not insist on seeing them in some degree of comfort. To people with somewhat less than philosophical acceptance of discomforts, the way in which many of the Broadway picture houses handle their patrons is extremely annoying. It is a common experience for one to buy admission to one of these theaters with the understanding that there are plenty seats available, or that, at the worst, there will be a few moments' waiting for seats, only to discover a great mass of similarly duped victims wandering hopelessly about on all floors of the gilded establishment. One is then obliged to mill sheepishly about gazing dull-eyed at florid examples of forgotten Flemish paintings, until after an hour or so a seat is found in which to view the closing incomprehensible sequences of a much-anticipated film.

Lodge seats at a half or more increase in price are rented under the same conditions. The box office is well aware that the loges have been and will be filled for hours by the hundreds of others who paid for orchestra or balcony and were only too anxious to pay the surcharge for a place to sit, yet tickets for loges continue to be sold with the assurance that there will be no wait for these seats. (The converse of this is strangely enough true at Radio City Music Hall where the reserved section is largely unoccupied during entire performances while signs in the lobby proclaim that there are no reserved seats to be had.) This confusion and lack of organization surely keeps people, who have suffered from its effects, away from the big mid-town theaters, and must in the long run be directly harmful to the exhibitors.

*I*F the damage done by the system would be limited to those exhibitors who insist on being penny-wise and pound-foolish, the matter would not be worth all this space. However, the effect is bound to spread further and to hurt others who had very little to do with the cause. A fine motion picture is the product of the brains of many gifted men who have labored long to create it. The film is an artistic whole, a dramatic entity with a beginning, a middle, and an end. As is the case in all art, no part of it can be changed without detracting greatly from its integrity.

To see a picture in any sequence other than that intended by its creators is a brutish insult to them and to oneself. There are many people who sit down before a film at whatever moment their indecisive steps may have

led them to the theater. About them I, at least, am not concerned. For the sake of those who often find themselves forced to miss the opening sequences of a picture because they have been wantonly misled at the box-office, and for the sake of the many artists and craftsmen who have toiled for the perfection of their pictures, this laxness must be abolished.

*I*T may have been all right for Samuel Johnson to say, menacingly, "What, Sir, do you read book *through*?" I wish I could answer him that I have never been able to read Boswell's life of him through, and there are many other books which, by reason of their nature or their length are best read at random—but when I go to the movies I want to see them through, not from middle to the middle, but from the beginning to the end. It is ruinous to the effectiveness of a film to see the last half and to sit through a lot of short subjects until the first half comes around. Furthermore, a fine picture establishes in me a certain mood, and if I see the picture from start to finish I can leave the theatre at once to cherish that mood, to brood over it or to be happy with it. I do not want its effect to be shattered by a senseless comedy, the news of the week, or the antics of a super-synthetic mouse, however admirable, when properly isolated, these things may be.

*BECAUSE* Laurence Schwab has produced several Broadway stage successes, Darryl Zanuck gives him a job making motion pictures. I wish Darryl would send back to my home town for Zu Stebbins. Zu always was a great hand for arranging the spring festivals, out at the fair grounds. Arranging festivals is just as good training for making motion pictures as producing Broadway plays is, and if Zu is the same old Zu of a score of years ago, he needs a steady job.

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## **My Thanks to Henry King**

For giving me an opportunity, in Lloyd's of London, to make my first appearance before a motion picture camera in America.

**Speirs Ruskell**

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HARRY  
HERVEY

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**MGM's**

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**"THE FOUNDRY"**

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**Being Scripted**

**for**

**HUNT STROMBERG**

**By**

**BARTLETT CORMACK**

◆



*Hollywood*

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**S P E C T A T O R**

Eleventh Year

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Volume 11

OCTOBER 10, 1936

No. 14

How the film industry can  
take care of the shortage  
in available acting talent

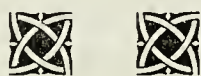
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**FRED ASTAIRE**



**WARNER BAXTER**



**RONALD COLMAN**



**JEAN HERSHOLT**



**GEORGE  
ARCHAINBAUD**

**Directed**  
**HIDEAWAY GIRL**  
**for**  
**PARAMOUNT**



JOHN BLYSTONE

Directed

MAGNIFICENT BRUTE

for

UNIVERSAL

Now Preparing  
a James Cagney Picture  
for Grand National

RICHARD  
BOLESLAWSKI

DIRECTOR  
THE GARDEN OF ALLAH  
THEODORA GOES WILD

DAVID  
BUTLER

Director  
Twentieth Century-Fox

FRANCES DEE

LOUISE FAZENDA

BARBARA STANWYCK

MARIE WILSON



From the

# Editor's Easy Chair



**M**OTION picture producers complain of a shortage in leading men. They seem to blame the parents of the nation for not raising more Bob Taylors. There is a shortage, and producers are hard put to get enough masculine big names to supply the demands of the season's scheduled productions. Like all other difficulties the film industry faces from time to time, this is one of its own creation. By the exercise of quite ordinary common sense it could have assured itself of the availability of two or three acceptable leading men for every one part to be cast. A fault of the present system is the industry's policy of devoting its chief attention to the exploitation of its established stars, of wringing them dry of box-office value as quickly as possible, and at the same time going about the discovery of their potential successors in the most involved and ridiculous manner. Every little while we read of some studio person leaving for the East on a "talent hunt," the chief physical manifestation of which is attending New York theatres and sizing up players composing the casts. Talent hunters never need leave Hollywood. There are more potential leading men and women here now than pictures can absorb in several decades. Screen writers and directors are the logical people to discover the box-office favorites of to-morrow.

\* \*

**A**S THE chief plank in this department's platform is never under any circumstances to be in a hurry—speed and pipe smoking not being consistent—let us go back a bit and work our way around to the postulate set down at the end of the above paragraph. Pictures make stars; stars do not make pictures—a truism uttered by someone else a long time ago and established as a fact by the box-office. When a picture makes a star, the star definitely is made. When the bellows of a publicity department are used to inflate a player to star proportions, such player is not a star until the box-office registers approval of the action of the bellows. Paramount thinks it can make Gladys George a star simply by putting her name in big type; and Twentieth Century thinks it can make a leading man of Don Ameche merely by presenting him as such. In neither case will the studio be successful, as both players lack that divine something essential to their elevation above the level of supporting players, and the most passionate puffs of the bellows will not make them anything else.

\* \*

**U**NIVERSAL'S production, *My Man Godfrey*, is scoring extraordinary success at the box-office. If we are to credit its stars, Carole Lombard and Bill Powell, with making it so successful, if we are to accept the theory that

stars *do* make pictures, then every picture in which the two appeared must have been equally successful, and, irrespective of the story values of their future joint pictures, each will duplicate the success of *My Man Godfrey*. The fact is, however, that the writer and director of the Universal picture did more to help Carole and Bill than Carole and Bill did to help the picture. Their names were responsible for the first audiences the picture attracted in various cities, but after that it was the picture itself, the word-of-mouth advertising, that was responsible for a steady stream of money pouring into the box offices. If unknown players, capable of giving as satisfactory performances, had appeared in the leading parts, the picture would have been slower in getting under way, but eventually the word-of-mouth advertising would have brought its gross returns up to a prosperous level. And if Carole and Bill had been the unknown players, this one picture would have made them stars. Janet Gaynor and Charlie Farrell did not make *Seventh Heaven*. The picture made them; the author and director made them. And sprinkled all the way through the history of films are similar instances of picture-made stars.

\* \*

**A**LL THE studios turn out class B pictures, although not all of them are designated as such. I see most of them. In the SPECTATOR appear reviews of about half of those I see, the others being so hopelessly poor that their reviews would be only unrelieved condemnation of class B writers and directors trying to make good under the handicap of skimpy budgets and abbreviated shooting schedules. I can see no reason why the SPECTATOR should put a spoke in the wheel of their forward progress by applying to their efforts the same critical standards applied to the productions of the first-flight directors, hence I say nothing about them. But I not yet have seen one of these unimportant pictures that could not have been made important by a proper application of picture brains. The only thing the matter with any of the stories is the manner in which they are told. As is the case with stars, pictures are not made important by important stories. They make the stories important. The *My Man Godfrey* story is hopeless drivel but it is made into scintillating screen entertainment by its author and the director.

\* \*

**W**E WILL begin now to bring together the various points we have raised thus far in our rambling discussion, and establish their inter-relationship. We have: (a) The screen needs new stars and leading men. (b) They can be made only by pictures of high entertainment value. (c) All producers turn out a lot of class B pictures.

(d) Most of this class are pretty awful. Obviously the inferior pictures can not make popular the players appearing in them. Let us take, at random, Marsha Hunt, one of Paramount's junior players, a girl with both talent and personality to get her somewhere. If we see her first in a picture written and directed so poorly we can see no virtue in it, we leave the picture house with the conviction that she is a poor actress whom we have no desire to see again. The unwise publicity policy of the film industry has made the public think in terms of players instead of pictures, and the players bear the full weight of picture weaknesses. Manifestly, then, if Paramount's intention is to relieve its star shortage by building Marsha into star proportions, it can achieve its end only by putting her in pictures the public will like, for, just as the public unjustly will blame her for the demerits of a poor picture, so will it credit her with the merits of a good one. In either case she appears in a reflected light. If she were fortunate enough to be in another *My Man Godfrey*, she would be established as a box-office asset.

**PAUL MUNI**, notwithstanding the brilliance of his stage career, was not established firmly with film audiences until his own brilliant performance, plus the other manifold virtues of *The Story of Louis Pasteur*, gave him box-office value. Any producer would have told you it was impossible to put whiskers on a man and establish him as a leading player, but Muni's art—and again, the *plus*—flourished in spite of the whiskers. *Henry VIII* and *Bounty* made Laughton. Pictures made Wally Beery, just as one picture made Janet Gaynor. All of which makes logical the conclusion that if the film industry is faced with the necessity of remedying a talent shortage, the way to go about it is to forget such talent and devote its attention solely to the making of the best possible pictures and permitting the pictures to replenish the depleted supply of stars and leading men. Class B pictures are the crucibles in which the desired talent can be compounded. Every poor one is just another neglected opportunity to produce new box-office personalities; every good one just the opposite. The writers and directors are available, and there is on hand an abundance of embryonic talent. Lacking only is front-office brains.

**WHILE** it is purely a family matter, being personal correspondence between Fred Stein, the *New York Spectacle* man, and me, I will reveal it to you just to show you what an editor has to put up with. Fred opened proceedings by complaining that there were too many typographical mistakes in his SPECTATOR department. Hard on the heels of the complaint came this: "Since writing the letter which I sent to you along with a copy of the *Devil Doll* typescript, I have returned home from the office where it was written and have met my best friend and severest critic, my wife, your niece, in short, Betsy. I casually gave her a copy of the letter to read, having done which she paled, rose unsteadily from out the chair in which she had been sitting and stated flatly that the paragraph in which I mentioned typographical errors was dictatorial, overweening, disrespectful, brazen, impertinent, impudent, insolent, brash, arrogant, presumptuous, overbearing, swaggering, high-handed, super-

cilious, flippant, barefaced, shameless, bluff, ill-bred, tactless, gross, insulting, boorish, blackguardly, rude, uncivil, impolite, ungracious, vulgar, ungentlemanly, pert, forward, ungainly, blunt, gruff, churlish and not nice. In defense I said that I didn't think you feel the same way about it, pointing out that Hollywood is notoriously full of yes-men whom you doubtless abhor and that, furthermore, as you had invited me to criticize your ideas in public, you would surely not mind my criticizing your printer in private. Nevertheless B. still thought the paragraph was under-timid, to use an adjective not found anywhere, so I am writing this letter to ease her mind and, if necessary, yours. The paragraph was written immediately after I had devoted three hours to digesting the Robinson-Patman Act, the undiplomatic language of which may inadvertently have stolen into my style. P. S. Betsy has read this letter also, and doesn't like it any better."

**THEN** I wrote Fred: "For Heaven's sake don't put any more foreign quotations in your stuff. If the impulse to do so becomes irresistible, do it this way: You cannot eat your cake and have it too, or, as the French so aptly express the same thought, *so and so*." And this is the way he comes back at me: "As to foreign quotations, I will write no more of them. If the impulse reaches the irresistible proportions you mention, I will put them as you suggest. A word to the wise is sufficient, or, as they say in France, *a bon entendeur demi-mot suffit*. One should always be eager to learn from one's elders, or, as the Romans had a habit of expressing it, *a bove majore discit arare minor*: I am only too glad to have you point out such errors in my style, for one is judged by one's style, or, as Buffon so aptly said, *le style est l'homme meme*. You seem to think I may resent this suggestion, but, on the contrary, I welcome it. I want you always to be frank with me about my writing. As Goethe has said, *zwischen uns sei Wahrheit!* Now that I have succumbed to the irresistible impulse for the last time, I will start doing a review for the SPECTATOR of *Ultimus Mohicanorum*, or, as we Americans have so quaintly translated it, *The Last of the Mohicans*."

**THINGABOBS**: Already tunes to be featured in Paramount's *Big Broadcast of 1937* are being broadcast on Radio programs. By the time the picture is released people who see it will wonder why Paramount did not dig up some new music for it. I suppose exploitation men know what they are doing, but broadcasting picture music before the picture is released, looks to me like a very silly proceeding. . . . Tuned in the radio in my car just in time to pick up the deafening scream of a police siren used in a series of crime broadcasts. All the traffic around me scattered, a boy fell off his bicycle and a policeman waved me through a stop signal. . . . If Dave Selznick picks Freddie March to play Rhett in *Gone With the Wind* he is going to reduce the box-office value of his picture. By the time it is released, millions of people will have read the book and all of them will resent a selection so different in every way from the author's description of the character. . . . *The Devil Is a Sissy* gets its name from a line in the dialogue. Judge of Juvenile Court

tells some boys that only regular he-men never commit crimes; that wayward boys are sissies, in fact, the devil himself is a sissy. . . . Judging from what I heard from the next table in the studio restaurant, I would say Metro soup is OK for sound. . . . In my time I have eaten in quite a lot of places here and abroad, but nowhere else have I encountered a staff of waitresses so attractive in appearance, so pleasing in personality, or so skilled in serving as the girls who work for John, the popular head waiter at the Beverly Brown Derby. . . . When we go to a preview of a Warner picture we are informed by a grave and polite usher that the two seats we like are in the three rows reserved for Mr. J. L. Warner and his guests. During Jack Warner's absence in Europe the three rows are reserved. . . . Elizabeth Bergner in *As You Like It* is running at the Carlton Theatre, London, while Norma Shearer in *Romeo and Juliet* is at His Majesty's, next door. After seeing Beerbohn Tree as MacBeth at His Majesty's one night, I stepped into a taxi and told the driver to take me to the Carlton hotel. He did. We rode the whole eighty feet without mishap, I paid him a shilling, he touched his hat, and we parted gravely. But he watched me carefully, not knowing I had been in London too brief a time to have acquired knowledge of its geography.

**O**NCE in my writing career I was employed to write a pamphlet for a man promoting an engineering project and who wanted it explained to the people he hoped to interest in it. I made the necessary study, did my writing and turned it in. He read it immediately and was pleased with it—complimented me highly, expressed surprise that I had grasped the essential points so readily and expressed them so clearly. I put his check in my pocket and departed. Next morning he phoned, requesting me to come to his office. He had been studying my manuscript over night, he told me when I joined him. Now, the second paragraph, he went on—and he went on and on, and when the pamphlet finally was printed, I offered thanks to high heaven that no one knew I had written the mangled thing he offered the public. Each of the people for whom it was intended, naturally would read the pamphlet only once, his first impression being all he would derive from it. The first impression it gave my employer was all he would have derived from it if he had read it only once, and that impression had been entirely satisfactory. But he had studied it, had read it over and over, seeking points he could improve, with the result that he took all the life out of it.

**T**HE film audience sees a picture only once, gets only its first impression. Those who make it see it many times. They do as my client did; they paw it over, think this scene needs fixing, that one needs cutting, but never think of the impression the picture gave them when they saw it for the first time. In all the years I have been writing them, I never have read a SPECTATOR. When I "put it to bed" I am through with it and occupy my thoughts with the yet unfulfilled hope that the next will be a good one. You get what I write word for word as I write it the first time. Perhaps you are one of those who subscribe for the SPECTATOR year after year. If so,

the presumption must be that you are satisfied with it. If you are, it is because you read one number only once. Take the number which satisfied you most, read it over, study each paragraph, each sentence—no, don't do that. I want you to keep your good opinion of it and I want to keep you as a subscriber. In motion pictures, in writing, in any of the arts, it is spontaneous response to spontaneous expression that is the measure of successful achievement. More pictures are ruined in the editing than in the making. The average producer thinks he must make changes if only to show who is boss. If he is pleased with a picture when he sees it the first time, he runs it over and over, looking for spots to improve. Some weeks ago I sat with a producer when he saw one of his pictures for the first time. After the showing I told him he should release it just as we saw it. When I left him he was shaking his head dubiously. Last week I saw the picture in a theatre. It was not nearly so entertaining as it was when I first saw it. It had been pawed over.

**T**HREE years ago, as I recounted in a previous SPECTATOR, the postman brought me an article with the name James Dalton Trumbo signed to it. I published the article and sent for the writer. He proved to be a young fellow working in a bakery for eighteen dollars a week. I told him that even if he starved, he should quit the bakery and devote all his time to writing. He took my advice and darned nearly did starve. The other day another postman brought me an advance copy of the second book Dalton Trumbo—at my suggestion he left the "James" in the bakery—has had published, *Washington Jitters*, (Alfred A. Knopf, 287 pages, \$2.00). It is a political satire, very funny in conception and most ably developed. It veils but lightly living people who today are helping to keep national affairs in turmoil, and toys in a delightfully humorous strain with a lot of new alphabetical commissions of its own creation. When you consider that Trumbo never has been east of the Mississippi, you will be astonished by the intimate knowledge of Washington's manners and customs he displays on every page. It is a book not only for people interested in politics; it is for those who can appreciate a brilliant example of sustained and most entertaining satire.

**T**HE significance of the death of Irving Thalberg to the entire motion picture industry here and abroad, is reflected in the lengthy comments made by European film papers. An impression of the feeling in London is given by the remarks of Ernest W. Fredman, editor of *Daily Film Renter*, on the day following the brilliant young producer's passing: "Nothing else talked about in Wardour Street yesterday, or, for that matter, in the studios—but the terribly tragic passing of Irving Thalberg. If his death stunned Hollywood, then it can also be truly said that it had a similar effect upon the film industry in this country. When the news reached me late on Monday evening I could hardly believe it—I hadn't the faintest idea that Thalberg was even ill—much less prepared for his sudden demise. It is a staggering blow to the entire motion picture industry—film production all over the world loses its greatest genius, and alas, there are too few geniuses in this industry, whether it be in Holly-

Dear Mr. Beaton:

I think the Spectator is  
swell! May it become as  
great in size as it is in  
content!

*Francis Lederer*

*Kathleen  
and  
Gene  
Lockhart*

**MORDAUNT  
SHAIRP**



Writer of  
Screen Plays



PRINCIPAL PRODUCTIONS  
ANNOUNCE

**BOBBY BREEN**

IN

**“RAINBOW ON THE RIVER”**

Released through RKO-Radio Pictures





wood or anywhere else, for that matter. Irving Thalberg had the uncanny sense—possessed by so very few—of instinctively knowing what the public wanted—that was his genius; his record was amazing. I can't even remember one picture of his that was a flop, but I can remember dozens that were tremendous box-office successes. His passing is a sad blow to the industry, because we can ill afford to lose men like Thalberg. It's an irreparable blow to Metro-Goldwyn, and leaves his many friends, both in Hollywood and here, stilled with grief at his unexpected death. He was only thirty-seven—imagine! Film production in every part of the world will mourn the passing of its greatest personality."

**HOLLYWOOD** had better look to its laurels. British competition is becoming more menacing. In London now, Tim Whelan, of Hollywood, is directing *Mill on the Floss* for National Provincial Films. Garnett Weston, of Hollywood, wrote the screen play, and John Stumar, of Hollywood, is cameraman. The title is British.

**MENTAL MEANDERINGS:** I pass his place on my morning walks and sometimes stop and chat with him. He is rough, illiterate, uncouth, profane, and always looks sloppy; he damns everything and won't vote for any bloody blank blank blank in the fall election for they're all just a pack of blank blank fools. But his flower garden, which he tends himself, is a riot of friendly bloom, and he fairly purrs when he lovingly touches a rose and directs my attention to it, the best blank blank roses grown, he assures me, by any blank blank fool in the neighborhood. He has four fig trees forming a square in which he has installed a bird bath where his feathered friends can wash themselves or have a drink after eating his figs. When his family wants figs, he goes to a market for them. . . . It is time Twentieth Century was realizing that in Shirley Temple it has a great actress and not only a song and dance doll. It is a shame the way her box-office value is being dissipated by the trashy pictures in which she is presented. She could do justice to any dramatic role suitable to her years. . . . If those casting pictures had longer memories, bigger hearts and sounder judgment, we would see Margaret Mann on the screen much oftener. . . . The Democratic party's habit of squandering money wildly has spread across the continent. Someone telegraphs me a 142-word day letter by Western Union, dated Hollywood, telling me that a motion picture division of Democratic committee will have headquarters in Hollywood Plaza Hotel. I'm for Landon. . . . *Film Daily* reports that studios now are receiving only half the number of fan letters they received when pictures were silent. The reason is not far to seek. When players began to speak, they became ordinary human beings, instead of illusive, fascinating shadows moving silently across the screen. The appeal of the talkie is in no way similar to that of the silent picture. The falling off in fan mail is just added proof of the soundness of the SPECTATOR's contention that when Hollywood went talkie it went into an entirely new business. . . . Hugh Herbert is taking his regular nap a little earlier each day, the idea being that eventually he will take it before he gets up in the morning. And since the Warner production

program has been increased, Hal Wallis is thinking of having his breakfast before he goes to bed in order to get to the studio a little earlier each morning. . . . If we may judge by the manner in which our daily papers and most of our parcels are fastened, Civilization has entered the Rubber Band Era.

**SPIED** Una Merkel lurching at the Beverly Brown Derby. Thought came to me that she would make an ideal Melanie in *Gone With the Wind*. Her talent is equal to all the demands the part would make upon her and that Southern drawl of hers would lend authenticity to her interpretation of it.

**JERRY HOFFMAN**, who is getting out of the spotlight with which the *Examiner* illuminated him and disappearing in the obscurity of a studio job, shares with me an opinion I often have expressed to picture directors and producers. In all the years both of us have been reviewing pictures, each of us has found that the pictures which got the best reviews were those he had viewed alone in a projection room. An idea prevails in studios that reviewers always should see pictures in theatres in order to get audience reaction. I have argued against it insofar as I was concerned, for many times in theatres I have caught pictures a second time after seeing them by myself at a studio, and never yet has one of them appeared to justify the good opinion I had formed of it. Seated alone in a projection room, I subconsciously allow for audience reaction to what I am seeing; I lose no lines by virtue of sustained laughter, nor do I hear laughter when in my opinion there should be none. I am not irritated by the obvious efforts of a studio clique to impress me with its applause, always a feature of previews in theatres. Another mellowing influence is the fact of my being the guest of the producer. I do not mean that I become mushy when I view a picture alone. Jerry and I merely agree that we always give better reviews to pictures we see alone than to those we see with large audiences, and we figured out the reasons.

**SAYS** *Daily Variety*, "Madame Hilda Grenier, once dresser to Queen Mary, has been engaged as technical adviser on Radio's *Quality Street*. Do you suppose her duties include telling the girls what kind of hats to wear?"

**QUOTING** *Motion Picture Herald*: Mr. Lasky confessed to the press the other day, while visiting Quebec, that the reason why motion picture producers chew cigars and act "queerly" is because "it's a great business to go crazy in." Mr. Lasky only recently admitted that he has won and lost several fortunes—totaling millions—in his 23 years in the film industry. "I've been producing movies since 1913," he told reporters in Quebec, "and sometimes it astonishes me that I still admit I'm Jesse Lasky and not Napoleon."

**AS YOU** approach the Warner Burbank studio your eyes will catch a sign: "In this studio Warner Brothers make motion picture history." I can recall no other motion picture sign which so nearly approaches the truth.

# SAMUEL BISCHOFF



**Associate Producer  
WARNER BROTHERS -  
FIRST NATIONAL**



**Charge of the Light Brigade  
Three Men on a Horse  
Cain and Mabel**

# LOU BROCK

PRODUCER  
for  
UNIVERSAL



Now in Preparation  
TOP OF THE TOWN

# BRYAN FOY

Associate  
Producer

WARNER BROS.-  
FIRST NATIONAL

*"Unquestionably Pete  
Smith is the greatest box-  
office name in the shorts  
field and deservedly so."*

W. R. Wilkerson  
"Hollywood Reporter."

## Some Late Previews

### Another You Must See

**LIBELED LADY**, an M-G-M production. Screen play by Maurine Watkins, Howard Emmett Rogers and George Oppenheimer; from the story by Wallace Sullivan; musical score by Dr. William Axt; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, William A. Horning, Edwin B. Willis; wardrobe by Dolly Tree; photographed by Norbert Brodine, A.S.C. Cast: Jean Harlow, William Powell, Myrna Loy, Spencer Tracy, Walter Connolly, Charley Grapewin, Cora Witherspoon, E. E. Clive, Lauri Beatty, Otto Yamoka, Charles Trowbridge, Spencer Charters, George Chandler, William Benedict, Hal K. Dawson, William Newell.

**WHEN** a city editor is so loyal to his paper that, to help it out of a suit for libel, he persuades his fiancée to marry a reporter, it's news. When Spencer Tracy is the editor, Jean Harlow the fiancée, and William Powell the reporter, it's entertainment. And when Myrna Loy is the person who is bringing the libel suit—well, then it becomes grand entertainment. And that is what *Libeled Lady* is—grand entertainment, a brilliant example of talkie craftsmanship, splendidly acted, of course, and splendidly directed by Jack Conway, as well as superbly mounted by Metro.

As I viewed the picture the thought occurred to me that it has become our habit to take too much for granted the contributions to Metro pictures made by Cedric Gibbons and his associates. I myself have written scores of times, "the usual MGM complete production," and let it go at that. But, after all, the screen is primarily a pictorial art, and the artist who paints in the backgrounds which gives the pictures their meaning, who provides the settings which make scenes, complete, and who, in designing artistic interiors, must have regard for their lighting possibilities and make provision for the practicability of the entrances and exits they provide—the artist who does all this must be credited with a large share in the success of successful pictures. So, to Cedric Gibbons and his staff I doff my hat for their contributions to *Libeled Lady*.

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**PREVIEWED** the night before this SPECTATOR is "put to bed," there is little time to give it an extended review. But it is just as well. Any review would be merely a string of superlatives. I say about all there is to say when I tell you it is a picture you must see. The performances of all four stars are up to the standards long since set by them. The characterizations differ, therefore comparisons are not possible. Each is so well done that we can not imagine any one of the players in the role of another.

The most hilarious sequence is that played by Bill Powell in the middle of a mountain stream in which he lands a fish it took a crew of six fishermen two weeks to find and make available for him. It is superb comedy, recorded by the camera to the music of the tumbling water. Norbert Brodine's photography maintains a high degree of artistic merit throughout the film. That Howard Emmett Rogers and Maurine Watkins served their apprenticeship in Newspaper offices is evidenced by

the authenticity they contribute to the newspaper story. Their dialogue sparkles. Frederick Y. Smith's expert film editing is a large factor in the success of the picture. And to Lawrence Weingarten must go credit for production supervision of high rating.

### Uniformly Excellent

**THE GAY DESPERADO**, United Artists release of Mary Pickford-Jesse L. Lasky production. Stars Nino Martini; features Ida Lupino and Leo Carrillo; directed by Rouben Mamoulian; original story by Leo Birinski; screen play by Wallace Smith; lyrics, Holt Marvell; music, George Posford, Miguel Sandoval; music director, Richard Day; assistant director, Robert Lee; costumes, Omar Kiam; film editor, Margaret Clancy. Supporting cast: Harold Huber, James Blackeley, Mischa Auer, Adrian Rosley, Alan Garcia, George Du Count, Ilia Khmara, Chris King Martin, Alphonso Pedroza, Harry Semels, Paul Hurst, Frank Puglia, Michael Visaroff, Len Brixton, Trovadores Chinacos. Running time; 85 minutes.

**GENUINE** entertainment, beautiful to look at, delightful to listen to, it has something of everything—farce, burlesque, romance; and something for everyone—young, old, dreamer, and realist. Four times during the preview showing there were generous bursts of applause for the photography of Lucien Androit. A locale similar to that of *Ramona* did not tempt Mary Pickford and Jesse Lasky to shoot *The Gay Desperado* in color. They present gorgeous examples of black and white photography, beautiful compositions superbly photographed, and adhering to the true principles of cinematic art by permitting the imaginations in the audience to function in supplying the color. Of the many notable features of the production, I mention the photography first because it is the first to arrest attention.

But before the film travels very far on its hour-and-a-half journey its downright cleverness impresses you, and thereafter the grin will leave your face only when the glorious notes of Martini's vocal numbers fill the theatre. Good, clean fun and music of rich artistic quality are blended into fascinating entertainment by one of the finest demonstrations of intelligent direction ever given a picture. Rouben Mamoulian never previously has given us anything to compare with his masterly handling of the varied elements composing *The Gay Desperado*, never before has revealed such a scintillating sense of humor. The composition of his scenes, too, is notable. At times he crowds his screen, but never to the point of lessening pictorial artistry.

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**MAMOULIAN** always has demonstrated his faith in the potency of the camera and has recognized its right to the position of chief importance in telling a story on the screen. A vivid exhibition of the power of the camera is given by the results attained in the case of the performance of Mischa Auer. This capable pantomimist is one of the highlights of the production, yet in all except one of his scenes, his face is immobile, his eyes alone giving expression to his comedy. The results he obtains graphically illustrate the great advantage the screen has over the stage as an entertainment medium. On the stage Auer's performance would have been meaningless except in the scene in which he makes his one speech, a spirited and amusing oration in which he rebukes his

MERVYN  
LE ROY  
PRODUCTIONS

FRANK LLOYD

PRODUCING *and* DIRECTING

MAID OF SALEM

FOR PARAMOUNT

WESLEY RUGGLES



PRODUCING  
and  
DIRECTING  
For PARAMOUNT

MEL SHAUER



PRODUCING  
FOR  
PARAMOUNT



leader, Leo Carrillo, for failure to live up to the high ideals of banditry.

Under Mamoulian's direction Martini reveals a talent for light comedy which entitles him to consideration as a first rate actor. His singing, of course, is outstanding, and coupled with his acting, will make him a staunch box-office favorite when *The Gay Desperado* is shown generally. His vocal numbers have the additional merit of having been worked logically into the story as integral parts of it. Leo Birinski and Wallace Smith, responsible respectively for the story and screen play, are to be credited with brilliant writing. The production is an elaborate one and all the performances are excellent.

### Among the Season's Best

**LADIES IN LOVE**, 20th-Fox production and release. Co-stars Janet Gaynor, Loretta Young, Constance Bennett; features Simone Simon, Don Ameche, Paul Lukas, Tyrone Power, Jr., and Alan Mowbray; associate producer, B. G. De Sylva; directed by Edward H. Griffith screen play by Melville Baker; based on play by Ladislau Bus-Fekete; photographed by Hal Mohr; art direction, William Darling and Hans Peters; set decorations by Thomas Little; Assistant and director, William Forsythe; film editor, Ralph Dietrich; Costumes, Gwen Wakeling; musical direction, Louis Silvers. Supporting cast: Wilfrid Lawson, J. Edward Bromberg, Virginia Field, Frank Dawson, Egon Brecher, Vesey O'Davoren, John Bleifer, Eleanor Wesselhoeft. Running time, 110 minutes.

**THOUGHTFUL** presentation of a story that is different, a collection of performances outstanding for the evenness of their excellence, direction worthy of the greatest praise, a production pictorially glamorous and beautifully photographed, *Ladies in Love* will go down on the season's records as a picture of importance, but perhaps not of the widest popular appeal. It is a little too fine for general consumption, too far from the beaten path.

This is the production with three stars, Janet Gaynor, Loretta Young and Constance Bennett, with Simone Simon thrown in for good measure as a featured player. The story is unusual in that the romances of the three stars have no connection with one another. That of Constance is involved with that of Simone, but throughout the length of the picture Janet and Loretta do not come in contact with Simone, apparently do not know of her existence. Thus we have in reality several stories which touch one another at intervals and then veer off, each to pursue its separate way. Melville Baker, author of the screen play, skilfully balances the various stories, preserves the identity of each, avoids confusing interlocking. His dialogue is crisp, and is clever by virtue of its obvious lack of striving for cleverness. The language of all characters is what we would expect from them.

**NOT** being familiar with the play which was the source of the screen story, I can only surmise that the original presented the three girls as living openly with their three men until the latter married the women they wished to live with permanently. The picture only hints at such possibilities, except, perhaps, in the case of the character played by Constance Bennett, who might be embarrassed if asked to explain who gave her the diamond necklace she wears prior to the departure of her lover (Paul Lukas) for his South American mines.

The strength of the story is derived mainly from the subtlety with which Ned Griffith tells it, by its lack of emphasis, by its leaving so much for us to surmise and presenting so much for us to interpret as we see fit. The strength of the production as a whole is derived from the degree of perfection attained in all its elements, acting, costuming, set dressing, exteriors, and the expert manner in which the elements were blended into a harmonious whole. We have time to be impressed by the physical elements and the manner in which they are photographed, as the pace of the story is a leisurely one which some viewers may regard as being too slow. I have no complaint to register on that account.

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**GRIFFITH'S** understanding direction is responsible for a collection of admirable performances. Although star-studded, there is no star, the three leading girls being of equal importance. While as a general practice it is unwise for producers to increase the talent shortage by putting too many big names in any one picture, in *Ladies in Love* it is necessary as the story would have been thrown out of tune if it had centered attention on one character. Griffith preserves the full harmony of the production by nicely balancing the various performances and turning the spotlight on none. He gives us a Janet Gaynor who reveals once more her inherent right to stardom, her performance being the most appealing she has given in a long time, the only one I can remember as comparing with her Diane in *Seventh Heaven*.

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**LORETTA YOUNG**, too, is admirable, particularly in one long scene which she plays alone and does not speak a word. It is beautiful acting, splendidly directed. Constance Bennett never appeared to more advantage. Photographed much better than in her recent British picture, and acting with full appreciation of the values of her role, she again establishes her right to star rating and gives me more confidence in my belief she would be a wise choice for the part of Scarlett in *Gone With the Wind*. Simone Simon just about pricks the bubble of greatness she established in *Girls' Dormitory*. She gives us only shadows of our memories of her allure in her first picture, and creates the impression that Twentieth Century will not lose greatly if her silly temperamental antics prompt it to endeavor to struggle along without her.

The men, particularly Alan Mowbray, add greatly to the feast of good acting. Mowbray reveals a brilliant comedy sense. If he would consent to the folly of being starred, he could become a strong box-office magnet. Wilfrid Lawson, a new-comer I believe, arrests immediate attention by the quiet force he reveals in one of the secondary parts.

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**WHEN** the publicity Mary Astor's diary was giving her was at its peak, an enterprising Minneapolis exhibitor secured one of her recent pictures, spent four times the usual amount on exploiting it as showing "the notorious Diary Girl," and yanked the attraction after it had done the worst three-days' business in the history of his house. The customers displayed much better taste than the exhibitor.

**ROWLAND BROWN**



**Writer**  
**DIRECTOR**

**TAY GARNETT**

to Direct

**THE  
LAST  
SLAVER**

For Twentieth Century-Fox



**WILLIAM K.  
HOWARD**

to Direct  
**SUMMER LIGHTNING**  
for  
**WALTER WANGER**



**WILLIAM WYLER**

DIRECTED

**DODSWORTH**

for

SAMUEL GOLDWYN



## Provides Interesting Study

**EAST MEETS WEST**, a Gaumont-British production. Directed by Herbert Mason; scenarist and assistant director, Maude Howell. Cast: George Arliss, Lucie Mannheim, Ronald Ward, Godfrey Tearle, Ballard Berkeley, Romney Brent, Norma Varden, John Varden, Peter Gawthorne, Ralph Truman.

**THIS** British made picture offers an interesting study for members of motion picture appreciation classes. It defies every cinematic law, rule, practice—whatever you wish to call it. It does not reflect knowledge by its producers of the first principles of screen entertainment. Yet it is honestly and ambitiously made, well directed, photographed acceptably and acted in a thoroughly satisfactory manner. But it is more interesting as a study in things not to do than it is as a motion picture.

I have written frequently that the screen and the stage have nothing in common, but that the screen and music have much in common. Screen entertainment which obeys its own laws has the same appeal as music—solely to our emotional side. Just as we do not have to exercise our intellects to react emotionally to what we hear when an orchestra plays, so should we not be called upon to exercise our intellects to react emotionally to what we see on the screen. Symphonic music requires musical knowledge for its understanding and enjoyment. Only in rare instances do symphony orchestras earn their keep by the patronage given them. Popular music requires no such knowledge; it pays its way and earns dividends. The stage is in the same relation to the screen as symphonic music is to popular music.

\* \*

**SCREEN** entertainment, to be successful at the box-office, must make its appeal directly to our elemental emotions. That is what makes it universal. All of us love, hate, have ambitions, inhibitions, show cowardice or display bravery. Of such elements are our personalities composed. And if screen entertainment is to appeal to all of us, it must be composed of the same elements. That is why screen romances please us most. We project ourselves into them.

*East Meets West* asks us to become interested in treaties being sought by an East Indian potentate. We are asked to be entertained by the sly manner in which he accomplishes the desired end. Before we can do that, however, we must become interested in the end itself, must desire to see the end accomplished or not accomplished. We can become interested in the efforts of a baby to reach its rattle, can sympathize with the baby's desire and be entertained by its struggle to attain it. The struggle has emotional value. Treaties between countries are purely material, devoid of emotional significance, and as the end is a matter of indifference to us, we can not be entertained by the efforts to achieve it.

\* \*

**NOR** can we project ourselves into the weird sort of romance the picture offers. The son of the potentate falls in love with the wife of an Englishman, and strives to accomplish the honorable estate of marriage with her by the somewhat questionable method of having the husband hung by the neck until dead. So completely do the elements composing the story fail to earn our sympathetic

interest, we could view dispassionately the hanging of the entire cast.

All the picture offers us is the manner in which the various things are done, but I repeat, before we can be entertained by the manner, we must become interested in the things themselves. Procuring the treaties desired by the potentate can interest us only to the extent of our desire to see them effected, and the picture fails to create such desire. George Arliss succeeds only in demonstrating again that he is a suave actor skilled in all the nuances of the acting art, but we do not patronize pictures to see actors act. Acting requires intellectual estimation, and we enjoy motion pictures to the extent in which they prompt our emotional response. There is more pure cinematic entertainment in a roguish gleam in Shirley Temple's eye than there is in Marc Anthony's oration. The oration belongs on the stage, the glance on the screen. As photographed stage technique, *East Meets West* is a success. As a motion picture it merely is an enlightening demonstration of what not to do on the screen. For that reason it is an offering Hollywood should see. It is at the Four Star Theatre.

## Industry As Background

**THE MAGNIFICENT BRUTE**, Universal production and release. Directed by John G. Blystone; associate producer, Edmund Grainger; screen play by Lewis R. Foster, Owen Francis and Bertram Milhauser; based on Liberty magazine story, 'Big,' by Owen Francis; photographed by Merritt Gerstad; art directors, Jack Otterson and Al D'Agostino; film editor, Ted Kent; special effects by John P. Fulton; musical director, Arthur Lange; sound recorder, William Hedgecock; editorial supervisor, Maurice Pivar; sound supervisor, Homer G. Tasker. Cast: Victor McLaglen, Binnie Barnes, Jean Dixon, William Hall, Henry Armetta, Ann Preston, Edward Norris, Billy Burrud, Ray Brown, Selmar Jackson, Adrian Rosley, Etta McDaniel, Zeni Vatori and Charles Wilson. Running time; 74 minutes.

**OF STORY** value in itself is the background against which *The Magnificent Brute* story is told. Drawing rooms, back-stage, department stores, newspaper offices, criminal courts no longer have power to interest us solely as backgrounds. In any event, they are easily accessible to us in real life, and do not amount to much when we find them. A steel mill is different. We do not encounter them on the main highways, their gates thrown wide. The nearest I have come to getting inside one was viewing this Universal picture. This morning I know vastly more of what goes on in the steel industry than I knew yesterday morning, thereby getting that much return for the time spent in viewing the picture even if it had failed to entertain me otherwise. The story did not stop to tell me what each photographed process meant, but I got a vivid impression of the conditions under which steel workers carry on.

In Los Angeles there are factories of every conceivable sort, and the owners of each of them would be glad to see its operations recorded on a motion picture screen. I do not mean that pictures should break out in a general industrial rash, but a more generous dose of such backgrounds would be a tonic to put new life into screen entertainment. If I do not see another two-acre modern living room on the screen in a year, it will be soon enough.

This Universal picture strikes a sturdy, elemental note. It is excellent entertainment, deriving a great deal of



**EDWARD LUDWIG**

*to Direct*

**WOMAN'S TOUCH**

*Starring*

**MIRIAM HOPKINS**

*for* **SAMUEL GOLDWYN**

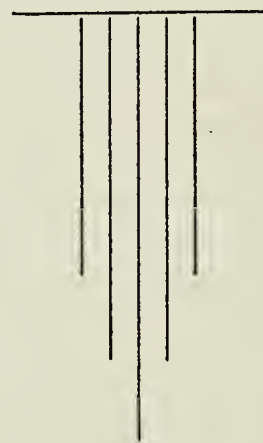


**JOSEPH SANTLEY**

DIRECTED

**Million Dollar Profile**

For RKO



**JOHN STAHL**

Producer-Director

**PARNELL**

Metro Goldwyn Mayer

**J. WALTER RUBEN**

DIRECTED

**OLD HUTCH**

FOR METRO GOLDWYN MAYER





its strength from its vigorous background. The glare of the streams of molten metal coursing their way through many of its sequences gives them pictorial fascination which heightens the effect of the drama enacted in them. The steel mill is something the characters have to fight, a physical menace, an over-powering force which at all times seems to threaten the stalwart men who move about in the shadows of its dangers.

But *The Magnificent Brute* has much more than that. It has the magnificent brute himself in the person of Victor McLaglen, who gives a flawless performance; a cast of players equal to the demands made upon them, and an engrossing he-man story with a romance traced delicately throughout its length. Blystone's direction is outstanding. In not one scene is there the slightest suggestion of acting to disturb the vivid impression of authenticity which the direction maintains, the players being people fitting naturally into their places in the human drama which holds our attention.

**P**<sup>\* \*</sup>*PARTICULARLY* creditable is the manner in which the romance is written and directed. A glance here, a word there, and we get the impression that Jean Dixon is becoming interested in McLaglen. At the end of the picture, reference is made to the fact of their impending marriage, but not in one scene have we seen an affectionate gesture or heard a word of tender import. The fade-out, however, strikes the only jarring note in the production. We leave the theatre with the raucous laughter of Vic McLaglen ringing in our ears. It is an offense without meaning, as there is nothing in the closing scene to justify the harsh bellowing. It leaves us with the impression that Vic may suddenly have gone crazy.

Among the many excellent performances is that of Billy Burrud, an actor who has reached the grand old age of eight or nine years. Fine performances by children make even more pronounced my oft-recorded conviction that the screen is not an acting art, that it needs only people so constituted that they can become the characters they are playing, and who can express the characters emotionally without the hampering influence of acquired acting technique. I offer Billy Burrud as testimony to the soundness of this opinion. Jean Dixon, Binnie Barnes, William Hall, Ann Preston, Henry Armetta and Edward Norris are others who assist greatly in making *The Magnificent Brute* so entertaining.

I can remember having seen Norris only once before. Producers are weeping over the lack of leading men, while in this young man, and a score of others easy to spot in current productions, there are possibilities needing only recognition and development to bring the supply of leading men even with the demand.

## Indifferent Entertainment

**THE BIG BROADCAST OF 1937**, Paramount production and release. Produced by Lewis E. Gensler; directed by Mitchell Leisen; screen play by Walter DeLeon and Francis Martin; based on story by Erwin Gelsey, Arthur Kober and Barry Trivers; art directors, Hans Dreier and Robert Usher; film editor, Stuart Heislor; sound, Harold C. Lewis; photographed by Theodor Sparkuhl; special photographic effects by Gordon Jennings and Paul Lerpae; musical direction, Boris Morros; music and lyrics by Ralph Rainger and

Leo Robin; dance ensembles by LeRoy Prinz; interior decoration by A. E. Freudeman. Cast: Jack Benny, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Bob Burns, Martha Raye, Shirley Ross, Ray Milland, Frank Forrest, Benny Fields, Sam Hearn, Stan Kavanaugh, Virginia Weidler, Eleanore Whitney, David Holt, Billy Lee, Irving Bacon, Leopold Stokowski and his orchestra, Benny Goodman and his orchestra. Running time; 94 minutes.

**U***SUAL* standards of picture criticism can not be applied to this Paramount production. Cinematically it is neither fish, flesh nor fowl, but a mixture of all three. The only standard by which it can be judged is that of your personal preference in the way of screen entertainment. I happen to be fortunate enough to possess no definite likes and dislikes in film fare, my only demand being whatever is done be done well enough to keep me entertained. That is something *The Big Broadcast* failed to do.

Between the chinks in a long procession of interpolated numbers, the wraith of a story twines its way. My sympathy goes to screen writers who are assigned the duty of concocting a story sturdy enough to preserve its integrity under the strain put upon it by its being compelled to embrace everything from Bob Burns' bazooka to Leopold Stokowsky's magic hands. Under even such handicap the writers of the story made rather a good job of it. Burns had to be in the film by virtue of Paramount's contractual obligation to pay him \$60,000 per picture for a term of years, and Stokowsky had to be in it to establish its right to serious recognition as an artistic endeavor.

**B**<sup>\* \*</sup>*BURNS'* brand of comedy has little appeal to me. He has exhausted my interest in his aunts and uncles, and offers me nothing as a substitute for them. His bazooka is as tiresome as his drawl. When we think of the many skilled comedians who would be glad to work for one-tenth of what Paramount pays Burns, we can regard his \$60,000 per picture only as an act of supreme folly that will be regretted by Paramount long before the contract runs out.

Stokowski's contribution to the picture is its greatest asset and its supreme artistic achievement. It gives symphonic music new meaning. We can fairly see the expressive hands of the batonless leader drawing the soul-stirring strains from the instruments. The camera treatment of the sequence strengthens its appeal. It gives us intimate touch with sections of the orchestra and suggests great possibilities for presenting the world's finest music in a form to make it acceptable to film audiences. Paramount is to be commended for the inclusion of this feature in its otherwise rather dull parade of numbers.

**G**<sup>\* \*</sup>*GRACIE ALLEN*, however, does not contribute to the dullness. She is a bright spot on the program. Jack Benny, Shirley Ross and Ray Milland give satisfactory performances, Shirley's singing earning the applause of the preview audience. I can not enjoy Martha Raye's brand of comedy, although I feel she could do well in a different characterization.

Decidedly to the credit of the picture is the imposing production given it by Lewis E. Gensler, and the manner in which the various items of entertainment are

**D. ROSS  
LEDERMAN**

DIRECTING  
FOR  
COLUMBIA



**ROBERT Z. LEONARD**

recently finished

**PICCADILLY JIM**

for M G M

previous release

**THE GREAT ZIEGFELD**



**ARCHIE MAYO**

*Directed*

**BLACK LEGION**

*for*

**WARNER BROS.**

*Current Release*

**GIVE ME YOUR HEART**

**GEORGE B. SEITZ**

**M . G . M .**

woven into the continuity. A picture of this sort does not offer much scope for a director's display of cinematic genius, but Mitchell Leisen has made a good job of it. Between them, producer and director, by keeping in mind the current popular taste, put considerable box-office into the picture, which after all is the matter of first importance. It merely happens that I do not like the picture, which is a matter of no importance whatever.

## Shirley's Talents Wasted

**DIMPLES**, 20th-Fox production and release. Associate producer, Nunnally Johnson. Stars Shirley Temple; features Frank Morgan, Helen Westley, Robert Kent, Astrid Allwyn, Delma Byron, Stepin Fetchit, the Hall Johnson Choir; directed by William A. Seiter; screen play by Arthur Sheekman and Nat Perrin; music and lyrics by Jimmy McHugh and Ted Koehler; dances staged by Bill Robinson; photographed by Bert Glennon; art direction, William Darling; set decorations, Thomas Little; film editor, Herbert Levy; assistant director, Booth McCracken; musical direction, Louis Silvers. Supporting cast: Berton Churchill, Paul Stanton, Julius Tannen, John Carradine, Billy McClain, Jack Clifford, Betty Jean Hainey, Arthur Aylesworth, Leonard Kibrick, Warner Weidler, Jesse Scott, Thurman Black. Running time; 79 minutes.

**UNQUESTIONABLY** one of the few really great screen actresses, Shirley Temple is presented again in the crooner-hooper role she has played in most of her previous pictures. If you want to see her performance once more, you can await the opening of *Dimples* in a first-run house, or catch her previous picture if it happens to come to your neighborhood house in the interim. Come to think of it, I believe I would advise your seeing the previous picture again. I can not recall its story, but I am sure it can not be as poor as the new one.

Darryl Zanuck was paid something between five and six million dollars in stock by Twentieth Century-Fox for putting his picture brain at the disposal of the company, and is drawing five thousand each week for exercising it on behalf of himself and other stockholders. My financial brain, when thinking in units, can not function in concrete terms when wrestling with a transaction involving more than the price of a full page advertisement in the SPECTATOR, so it is with much trepidation I venture the opinion that Darryl is not doing right by our Shirley, that he is failing to develop her full value as one of his company's assets. He persists in presenting her as an entertaining child carrying the full weight of her pictures by revealing each time her full bag of tricks.

\* \*

**THE** fact that she is an accomplished actress, not merely a hooper and singer, does not seem to have occurred to Shirley's producer. She can not dance and sing her way into permanency as a box-office attraction, but she could capture and hold the heart of the entire world in strongly emotional roles which would match her years and give her talents full play. Her characterizations should be part of the story, and the story should be strong enough to carry the picture. In *Dimples* she is the whole show, the story being merely uninteresting incidents to provide her with exits and entrances.

Besides Shirley herself, the chief merit *Dimples* has is the expert direction given it by William A. Seiter. He gives a semblance of strength to a story inherently weak,

makes us almost believe the unbelievable. Particularly effective is his grouping in scenes which gave him opportunities to provide attractive composition for Bert Glennon's artistic photography. Frank Morgan, Helen Westley and Robert Kent give good performances, and the Hall Johnson Choir contributes some of its grand, organ-like singing. Shirley reveals increasing grace and agility in her dancing, and sings her songs with her usual intelligent expression. She does everything well enough to make one impatient to see her in something more worthy of her talents.

## Has Its Shortcomings

**THE BIG GAME**, Radio release of Pandro S. Berman production. Directed by George Nicholls, Jr.; screen play by Irwin Shaw; based on story by Francis Wallace; musical director, Nathaniel Shilkret; football scenes directed by Edward Killy; Photography by Harry Wild; art direction by Van Nest Polglase, with Howard Campbell as associate; recorded by James G. Stewart; edited by Frederic Knudtson; assistant director, Doran Cox. Cast: Philip Huston, James Gleason, Andy Devine, Barbara Pepper, June Travis, Bruce Cabot, C. Henry Gordon, Guinn Williams, John Arledge, Frank M. Thomas, Edward Nugent, Margaret Seddon, Billy Gilbert, John Harrington and Murray Kinnell. Football players: Jay Berwanger, William Shakespeare, Robert (Bobby) Wilson, James (Monk) Moscrip, Irwin (King Kong) Klein, Gomer Jones, Robert (Bones) Hamilton and Frank Alustiza. Running time; 72 minutes.

**WHILE** this one by no means is a football picture to put an end to football pictures for this season, it is entertaining, and when it reaches that good, old reliable last-minute-winning-touchdown, you will feel like cheering even though you knew the game was fixed by the author of the screen play and that it was scriptly impossible for the wrong team to win, even with the score six to one in its favor with only one minute to play. To come from behind like that is a tough proposition for a football team to be up against, but it is nothing at all for a screen author when his typewriter is in good condition.

When you wend your way to the picture house showing *The Big Game*, take only your sporting instincts with you. If you take along your sense of screen values, and estimate the virtues of the film from the standpoint of what it might have been, you are going to be disappointed. I believe I have seen all the football pictures made in Hollywood in the last dozen years, but I still am waiting to see one which develops all the possibilities of the subject. Each fall the United States works up a tremendous interest in the college game, but as yet it has not been given a motion picture which reveals a correspondingly tremendous ability of Hollywood to realize the box-office possibilities of the subject.

\* \*

**UPWARDS** of one hundred thousand people assembled in one place is in itself a big thing, irrespective of the motive responsible for it. It is an interesting study in mob psychology, one that presents a challenge to the best brains in the film industry. Such gatherings are common in this country during a football season, and have a deeper significance than Hollywood yet has plumbed. The great football motion picture is yet to be made; the tre-

# ROBERT FLOREY

To DIRECT

HAPPINESS PREFERRED

For MAJOR PICTURES

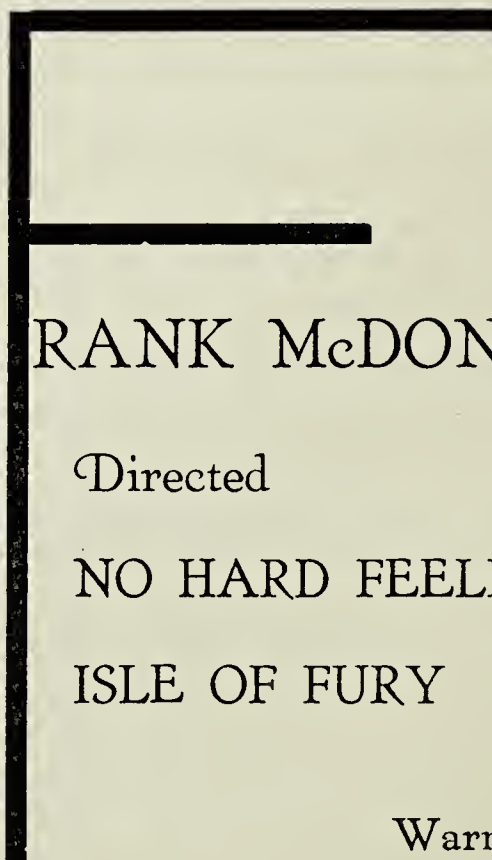


E. A. Dupont  
Under Contract  
To Paramount

**ALFRED E. GREEN**  
DIRECTOR

TWO IN A CROWD  
for Universal

THEY MET IN A TAXI  
for Columbia



**RANK McDONALD**

Directed

NO HARD FEELINGS

ISLE OF FURY

Warner Bros.

mendous one, one which does full justice to the subject, has not been hinted at.

Radio's *The Big Game* is a queer mixture. It presents the popular sport as a gambling racket but suggests no method of taking it out of the racket class; fills it with dirt, but suggests no cleaning process. It justifies the practice of hiring huskies to pose as college students and earn their way by playing football. It shows racketeers mixing freely with players and inside information being relayed to the gambling fraternity throughout the country. It hints that players are paid to throw games. In short, it smears the sport with an ugliness the public would be pleased better to know nothing about. Instead of being content to capitalize, in box-office terms, the country's conception of football as a clean sport, it presents it in a light that will be resented.

**W**HEN we estimate the values of *The Big Game* in cinematic terms, we are forced to give it poor rating. It reveals a comedy sense of infantile proportions and lacking in appreciation of what constitutes good, clean fun. Not one comedy scene is connected even remotely with the story continuity. Edward Nugent, designated in the cast as "A drunk," is just that and nothing more. Apparently he is a college student. His total contribution to the picture is a series of shots showing him taking drinks from a bottle and embarrassing a decent looking girl who accompanies him to football games. I think it is supposed to be funny. Andy Devine phones his wife after each of the games of which we get a flash. By the second time, the gag is worn out; by the sixth time it is extremely tiresome. Evidently RKO has a low opinion of audience intelligence. Either that, or we are justified in having a low opinion of its own intelligence.

Philip Huston makes his first screen appearance in this picture, playing the lead. I do not know where he came from, but the impression he makes is a favorable one. I see no reason why he should not have a successful screen career. Jim Gleason's performance is one of the best he has given of late. June Travis strikes a pleasing note. I was glad to see that capable actor, C. Henry Gordon, in a sympathetic role. It was quite refreshing. Here and there throughout the film Nathaniel Shilkret intelligently sprinkles some music. How he and his fellow musical directors must be longing for the inevitable day when producers awaken to the fact that each motion picture should have a continuous score.

## Gal and Jools Again

15 MAIDEN LANE, 20th-Fox release of Sol M. Wurtzel production. Directed by Allan Dwan; screen play by Lou Breslow, David Silverstein and John Patrick; based on story by Paul Burger; photographed by John Seitz; assistant director, Samuel Schneider; film editor, Alex Troffey. Cast: Claire Trevor, Cesar Romero, Douglas Fowley, Lloyd Nolan, Lester Matthews, Robert McWade, Ralf Harolde, Russell Hicks, Holmes Herbert. Running time; 60 minutes.

Reviewed by PAUL JACOBS

**W**HEN a crook fights crooks, it's news. But when a crook who is not a crook, fights crooks, it's headlines. Claire Trevor is the good little girl who goes naughty with a noble purpose and breath-taking results. A picqu-

ant portrayal, Miss Trevor's ability is a high note in this rhythmic and fast-tempoed expose of the jewel-snatch racket.

*15 Maiden Lane* is the great New York gem center where Cesar Romero pulls a smooth robbery and launches one of the most entertaining battle-of-wits made this season. Romero, as a slick, two-fisted killer who knows all the parlor tricks, gives his finest portrayal to date and sets a precedent for silk-gloved brutality that will prove hard to top.

Paul Burger's original is skilfully translated by Lou Breslow, David Silverstein and John Patrick. Rapidly accelerated from the start, and deftly directed by Allan Dwan, Sol M. Wurtzel's newest offering is sustained interest throughout.

**A**S ALWAYS, credit is due the film editor for cohesion so vital to every picture; Alex Troffey knows his cinematic values. Competently photographed by John Seitz and given splendid sound treatment, *15 Maiden Lane* has but one weakness; if the excellent scoring had been complete and emotionally synchronized to the point where it remained unnoticed, this production would have been outstanding.

Lloyd Nolan has risen phenominally by virtue of his consistently fine portrayals. As the fast-thinking detective, he adds another gem to his collection.

Uniformly excellent, Douglas Fowley, Lester Matthews, Robert McWade, Ralf Harolde, Russell Hicks and Holmes Herbert bring reality's vivid touch to each characterization, inducing through their support those mood-building moments which make any picture great entertainment. *15 Maiden Lane* is just exactly that.

## She Gets Her Man

ALONG CAME LOVE, A Richard A. Rowland production of Paramount release. Directed by Bert Lytell; associate director, Duncan Mansfield; original screen play by Austin Strong with added continuity by Arthur Caesar; art direction by Ralph Berger; photographed by Ira Morgan; musical direction, Boris Morros; film editor, Edward Robbins; sound, William Fox. Cast: Irene Hervey, Charles Starrett, Doris Kenyon, H. B. Warner, Irene Franklin, Bernadene Hayes, Ferdinand Gottschalk, Charles Judels, Frank Reicher and Mathilde Comont. Running time; 72 minutes.

Reviewed by PAUL JACOBS

**A**GAIN Welford Beaton's advice to me finds significant application. *Along Came Love* is Austin Strong's first screen play. Were it to be judged rigidly, its countless little weaknesses would total heavily. But as a first experiment in a new medium, *Along Came Love* is an almost brilliant achievement.

And Mr. Strong is not the only one to prove himself adaptable. When I saw Bert Lytell listed as director, I wondered if this splendid troupier could subjugate his instinctive stage technique and training sufficiently to make a picture instead of a filmed play. I knew of his long years in both stage and screen as an actor of the first rank; but playing and directing are fields apart, and I suspected Bert's early training would prove to be too strong. However, I had not reckoned with Lytell's shrewd discrimination and keen sense of comparative dramatic values. His direction of *Along Came Love* is

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ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

WARNER BROTHERS

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UNDER CONTRACT TO  
PARAMOUNT

IN PRODUCTION  
**ROSE BOWL**



**EDWARD F. CLINE**

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**PARAMOUNT**

**ALBERT LEWIS**

Producing  
for  
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Current Paramount Releases  
**MY AMERICAN WIFE**  
**A SON COMES HOME**

little short of a masterpiece. In its new position on the credits list, the name Bert Lytell will add new laurels to its already great distinction.

**A**S *THE* bargain basement Cinderella, Irene Hervey pursues her star of destiny, Charles Starrett, with a captivatingly sweet honesty of purpose. Miss Hervey gives us a fine example of filmic, as differentiated from stage, acting. She is so utterly her own unaffected self, that we forget she is in a picture, is paid a staggering salary and probably never saw a bargain basement.

Charles Starrett, although at times under evident strain, manages to please us with his complete masculinity. He is at better advantage in action pictures where less acting and more muscle is the dramatic criteria.

At the risk of being repetitiously offensive, for I have said this many times, I cannot attempt an individual appraisal of the support. Somehow, one does not lightly approach the task of standing in the judgment seat when discussing the names that have made Hollywood the focal point of the civilized world. From lovely Doris Kenyon and gently aristocratic H. B. Warner, to deftly aplombic Frank Reicher, *Along Came Love* offers the best in old-school greatness.

Had the musical scoring been less obvious and had film editor been more perceptive, producer Richard A. Rowland would have a corking film. Even as it is, *Along Came Love* is genuine entertainment. But most importantly, it portends the possibility of a new era for Paramount.

## Competent Job

**THE PRESIDENT'S MYSTERY**, Republic release of Nat Levine production. Directed by Phil Rosen; associate producer, Burt Kelly; story conceived by Franklin D. Roosevelt; written for Liberty Magazine by Rupert Hughes, Samuel Hopkins Adams, Anthony Abbot, Rita Weiman, S. S. Van Dine and John Erskine; screen play by Lester Cole and Nathanael West; photographed by Ernest Miller; musical settings by Dr. Hugo Riesenfeld; musical supervision, Harry Grey. Cast: Henry Wilcoxon, Betty Furness, Sidney Blackmer, Evelyn Brent, Barnett Parker, Mel Ruick, Wade Boteler, John Wray, Guy Usher, Robert E. Homans, Si Jenks, Arthur Aylesworth. Running time; 80 minutes.

Reviewed by PAUL JACOBS

**L**ACKING the primary essence of Liberty's change-of-identity serial suggested by the President, Nat Levine's new production has injected a new verve and punch which amply compensates. Scripted by Lested Cole and Nathanael West from the story by Rupert Hughes, Samuel Hopkins Adams, Anthony Abbott, Rita Weiman, S. S. Van Dine and John Erskine, the dramatic and filmic movements have been welded admirably into a smooth, actively progressive plot. A generous measure of the finely rhythmic effect is due to Director Phil Rosen's competent guidance, and to Film Editor Robert Simpson's understanding of cinematic art.

An odd touch was added by having Henry Wilcoxon read the *President's Mystery* from which his own story is concocted. Wilcoxon, by the way, is given his first opportunity to prove himself more than a costume mannikin. He turns out to be a splendid actor and deserving of the best roles Hollywood can offer.

**A** *STORY* is perhaps most accurately rated in terms of its oppositional force. Villainy in *The President's Mystery* is powerfully motivated in the suave dastardliness of Sidney Blackmer. That the entire audience hated him with an audible vigor is the most sincere tribute it could pay him.

Betty Furness, as the fighting owner of a bankrupt canning industry, precipitates the motivation and gives herself another boost by her spontaneity and natural charm. Evelyn Brent is seen briefly and to advantage as the unfaithful wife who causes most of what little mystery there is.

Strong support is given by Barnett Parker in a laugh-provoking characterization of the perennial butler; Wade Boteler is most effective in a small bit, and John Wray, Guy Usher, Robt. Homans, Si Jenks and Arthur Aylesworth complete a uniformly capable cast.

Associate Producer Burt Kelly may be proud of his results. Practically mounted, with effective photography by Ernest Miller, and currentted throughout by Dr. Hugo Riesenfeld's moodful settings, *The President's Mystery* is warmly recommended for its thorough workmanship.

## Below The Average

**THE CASE OF THE BLACK CAT**, Warners release of First National production. Produced by Bryan Foy; directed by William McGann; story by Erle Stanley Gardner; screen play by F. Hugh Herbert; dialog director, Frank Beckwith; photography by Allen G. Siegler; film editor, Frank Magee; art director, Hugh Reticker. Cast: Ricardo Cortez, June Travis, Jane Bryan, Craig Reynolds, Carlyle Moore, Jr., Gordon Elliott, Nedda Harrigan, Garry Owen, Harry Davenport, George Rosener, Gordon Hart, Clarence Wilson, Guy Usher, Lottie Williams, Harry Hayden, Milton Kibbee and John Sheehan. Running time; 65 minutes.

Reviewed by ALLAN HERSHOLT

**T**HAT it has some good portrayals and a pictorially impressive production is about the best which can be said for *Black Cat*. It fails to capture what is the most essential thing in a cinematic offering of this sort, the illusion of reality. Sometime ago I read a Van Dine mystery story, the title of which I cannot recall. Fundamentally it possessed the same faults that this narrative does, and it was considerably more illogical, yet it reached the screen with genuine success. While witnessing it, we were not permitted to stop and think of the impossibilities unfolding before us or of the other weaknesses. We subconsciously felt that what was being disclosed were actual happenings, for every moment was coming in a completely real and convincing manner. The newer film having failed to achieve the qualities of actuality and deftness in treatment, its spectator does not forget his presence at the unreeling of a picture.

*Black Cat* makes its screen appearance as an artificial, unconvincing and inconsequential affair. Its plot, which is typical of the average mystery plot in that it will not bear thorough inspection, owns a wealth of substance and no small amount of originality. Conventional liberties are not entirely absent, appearing at times rather prominently, but then a mystery story without them is indeed a rare thing. With little exception is one able to regard the characters as genuine people, while with no exception

**SAMUEL  
HOFFENSTEIN**  
WRITER OF  
SCREEN PLAYS

**BARRY TRIVERS**  
WRITING  
FOR  
PARAMOUNT



LUCI WARD

Under Contract to Warner Bros.

Screen Plays\*

MURDER BY AN ARISTOCRAT

THE LAW IN HER HANDS

MELODY FOR TWO (King of Swing)

BAD MAN'S TERRITORY (In Production)

Original Stories

MOUNTAIN JUSTICE

(In Production—Screen Play in Collaboration)

LAWYER WOMAN

A Cosmopolitan Magazine Story, October Issue

CARGO DE LUXE

Original Available: BLACK SATURDAY

\*In Collaboration

  
WALDEMAR  
YOUNG

*Screen Playwright*



Under Contract  
to  
Paramount



does the meager quantity of humorless comedy provide enjoyment; in fact one must be an adept individual to realize that portions of the film are intended to amuse.

There is a sufficient amount of mystery to keep the outcome well covered until the proper moment and when the denouement does arrive, it proves to be quite surprising. As the complicated pattern reveals itself, the spectator watches with a detached sort of interest, a trifle curious to know what the next step will be, but at no time is he genuinely absorbed or able to overlook the inadequate handling of the story. At least, this reviewer was affected in that manner. Had a director-scenarist combination of the sort which gave us *Thin Man* collaborated on the production of *Black Cat*, this might have been a film as notable as the Metro offering was. As a matter of fact, the newer story is basically no better than the other was.

## Cinematic Pulse

By Paul Jacobs

HAVING FIRST taken the precaution of imbuing my sour soul with the benign fragrance of a freshly filled pipe, I am searching through the belligerent dust of memory. It is a strange retrospection; a sometimes vivid panorama of arresting beauty, which may merge gracefully into sombre mental shadows, or break bluntly through the thin glitter of tradition. In short, I have been musing on the pictures I have seen in 1936 and the film people I have encountered.

There is vast portent to the remembrance of things past. From the prosaic welter of our casual existence and its endless stream of impressions thrust upon the conscious mind, those experiences at variance with the usual are most powerfully retained, to sink into the reservoir of our subconscious; there to be catalogued and held in readiness for the appropriate moment of intellection, when some association of ideas calls them forth. Thus, of this incredible kleidoscope that is Hollywood, there stands out the recollection of pictures and performances which most nearly conform to the dictates of cinematic law.

This year's first excellent film-drama was unquestionably *Captain Blood*. Scrutinized from every technical and dramatic angle, it reveals a uniform precision of workmanship that excels in several departments its last year's magnificent rival, *Mutiny on the Bounty*. For example, *Mutiny* in its stark brutality, disregarded cinema's law of universal entertainment: that it shall offend or even disturb no one of its potential audience. *Captain Blood*, on the other hand, spilled its gore so deftly that it left no stench. Another cinematic error in *Bounty* with a corresponding strength in *Captain Blood*, was the often incongruous scoring of the former, with its inevitable misalliance of the emotions; while the latter used its music unostentatiously, matched it to the mood and tempo, and achieved a powerful emotional prop. Lastly, *Captain Blood* was the love story of two people around whom the entire movement centered; *Mutiny* sometimes lost thematic identity in its terrific scope.

Speaking of theme, immediately brings to mind *These Three*, and *Mr. Deeds Goes To Town*. Completely in-

imical in plot and mood, and consequently in tempo, both are striking examples of the powerful effect achieved through intelligent use of them, and its comprehensive influence on mood treatments.

A gripping human document, *These Three* derived its power neither from the inexorable tragedy of its plot, nor from the bitter strength of its *raison d'être*, but from a deft exposition of human equations—theme in its purest form. Less deeply and more broadly, *Mr. Deeds* employed basically identical principles, but directed them into a lighter channel. In each, therefore, emotional value and subsequent audience-interest were equally intense; the inevitable result of intelligently applied theme.

In *The Ghost Goes West*, a light-tempoed satirical phantasy, England gave us an outstanding example of properly applied mood; achieving without strain or loss of natural rhythm, an effect of plausible absurdity. Except for *Midsummer Night's Dream* and Will Roger's ancient classic, *One Glorious Night*, no American phantasy that I can remember has sustained a mood sufficiently valid to support audience-credulity over a physically impossible plot. But our emotions are vulnerable to guile. In the three pictures, the patterning of psychologic, dramatic and cinematic elements produces a mood capable of seducing the intellect and freeing the emotions, allowing them to dictate our beliefs—an emotional hypnosis. And in all three pictures, that mood is created and continuously fed by the camera. Hollywood will eventually learn that its precocious brain-child, dialogue, is costly to coddle.

The performance which I have remembered about all others, is Charles Laughton's Captain Bligh. In my opinion, no finer, more exquisitely shaded villainy has ever been presented to a film audience. The only man in Hollywood capable of approaching his thorough detestableness is Basil Rathbone, whose suave butler of *Private Number* sets a new high for dastardliness. And among the ladies, my choice is a villainess, also. As *Dracula's Daughter*, Gloria Holden magnificently executed the year's most difficult role. She gave us a weird, half-human creature of Darkness whom we liked and detested, for whom we felt both pity and revulsion.

\* \*

APPROPOS of villainy, or opposition, its specific structure and function are sufficiently vital to the dramatic pattern to merit a detailed analysis. In a recent SPECTATOR I sketched briefly its general form and proportion. Let us apply them to dramatic law. The significance of Opposition is made apparent when we realize that until it appears, there can be no story. The dramatic machinery cannot function without it. Therefore the good film story introduces its villain (physical, mental or social) immediately, and never once drops him from the consciousness of the audience.

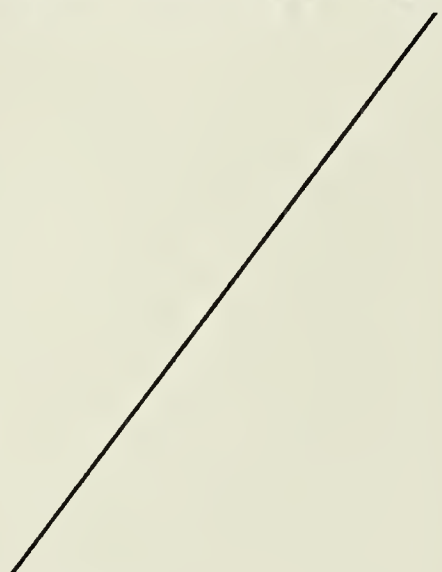
Opposition must be lurking behind every scene, imbuing every sequence with the sinister shadow of its intent. It must be powerful, dangerous, almost invincible. And the villainy, or oppositional effort, must be as plausible, as justified or logical in its perhaps warped reason, as the counter-desire of the hero. The ultimate in fine villainy is the antagonist whom we both admire and dislike.

A dramatic weakness in many pictures is the lack of purpose in their villainy. Every effort of the opposition

# LAIRD DOYLE

SCENARIST

Warner Bros.-First National



OIL FOR THE LAMPS OF CHINA  
THREE MEN ON A HORSE  
FRONT PAGE WOMAN  
CAIN AND MABEL  
HEARTS DIVIDED  
BRITISH AGENT  
BORDERTOWN  
DANGEROUS

# BRADLEY

# KING

Author of

MAID OF SALEM

A Frank Lloyd

Paramount Production

# DUDLEY

# NICHOLS



Screen Play

THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS

# Casey Robinson

Screen Play

GIVE ME YOUR HEART

Now Preparing

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WARNER BROS.

must be deliberate. The antithetical story-movement must flow from the conscious effort of the villain to defeat the protagonist's desperate counter-attempts toward their mutual goal. In other words, to defeat the villain, or to stymie the hero by an accident, a fluke or a coincidence, destroys the logical story progression, and our interest with it. Once let the audience infer that our hero is having his fight fixed for him by the tossing in of obvious coincidence, and that picture will not give satisfaction. But, on the other hand, to inject constantly the inference that our villain cannot but win, to constantly place our protagonist in a seemingly deadly predicament from which defeat seems inevitable—and then extricate him by his own efforts—there is the story which keeps its audience cramped on the edge of its chair. And this applies to all struggles, to all villainy, to all protagonism, or heroism, be they physical, mental, emotional or spiritual. The constant inference of danger or defeat to the hero, is the guarantee of cinematic success.

## New York Spectacle

**T**HE election campaign is being waged with much enthusiasm in Pennsylvania. The New Deal lost one of the early rounds when it was revealed that W. P. A. workers and funds were being used to set up highway billboards which point out the benefits of the Roosevelt regime. The Republicans unfortunately used only their own money to finance their roadside advertisements, which give the following profound message to the voters of Schuylkill County: "Mother Nature can't be regimented. Don't gamble with the food supply. . . (Signed) Alf Landon, Our Native Son." I think that Alf's generalization is rather vulnerable. Whatever progress may have been made by the human race since the time when it was winging about in trees has largely been achieved through "regimentation of Mother Nature," and our main hope for the future lies in regimenting the lady further.

As to the food supply in particular, and the droughts which so often affect it, we shall not have to worry about these any longer when we have learned how to adapt to our own uses the means by which Nature is regimented by the squirrel and the beaver. The signature, "Alf Landon, Our Native Son," also gives me pause. Obviously this hallowed message is given to the citizens of Pennsylvania by the National Republican Party and not by the proud State of Kansas alone. The word "Our" must refer, then, to us in America and not to "us" in Kansas, and from this we may conclude that the party wishes to point out that Alf Landon was born in the United States. The Republicans, I presume, wish to guarantee to the voters that their candidate positively has at least one of the qualifications for the job.

**W**HEN will the animators of colored cartoons discover a new idea for their shorts? With the exception of Walt Disney they seem to have limited themselves by common agreement to variations on the theme of a shopful of toys which come to life while the proprietor is away. The little wooden animals and men generally bear a rather remote resemblance to well-known actors, radio stars and international figures. A welcome change

from the routine treatment, yet one which would still adhere to the basic and apparently essential idea, would be the following: The short begins with a shot of the interior of a large sky-lighted room, where we see hundreds of cute little wooden men sitting in long, precise rows before hundreds of little square drawing boards.

The miniature men are truly remarkable. They resemble humans in everything but stature and life; their backs are bent and their heads are bald from sedentary work, and we even see the sweat which it has brought to their brows. Each holds a pencil, and each pencil is poised, ready to drop to the paper at some signal and begin the common task. Suddenly a door opens and The Boss, a real human being of normal stature, steps before them. "Gentlemen," he says, "animated cartoon number 767, upon which you shall work this morning, will be practically identical with number 766, which was about the same as number 765, which was based on number 764, which was a slightly rearranged duplicate of number 763 and so on, if you can remember that far back. Further instructions will, as usual, not be necessary. When the musical clock in the corner strikes nine you many come to life and begin to draw." Having pronounced these words The Boss silently retires from the drafting room. Now the musical clock strikes nine, and nine times a cuckoo thrusts out its wild face and breaks the airy stillness with its weird, haunting cry.

**A**T THIS signal the little wooden draftsmen start into life; the hundreds of wretched hunched backs bend closer to the drawing boards, the poised pencils drop to the paper, the poised beads of sweat on the many brows begin to roll. This action goes on for ten minutes to the screaming delight of America's millions. But now events take a wholly unprecedented turn. We see a heretical departure from established precedent in the field of animated art. In short, this cartoon has a problem ending, an ending which may be thought bitterly tragic or wholly delightful, depending upon whose seat you happen to be sitting in. Suddenly an airy, dark blue substance begins to seep in through the windows and to fill the room. It is the wave of intelligent public opinion. It creeps over our little friends like dilute hydrochloric acid creeping over a field of jiggling paramecia under the microscope; their movements become slower and less abrupt, a few move about in aimless reflex action, and finally all stop, lifeless once again.

In the meantime the same dark blue cloud, floating menacingly in and about the building like the ink of an offended octopus, filters through every aperture into the private office of The Boss. He is overcome and retires to a still more private office to upchuck and to be alone. When he has somewhat recovered he emerges and rushes into the drafting room, to warn the workers of the approaching danger. But he is too late; his commands have no more meaning for the little crooked men. He rushes to the windows and opens them, hoping to let the heady fragrance out. Instead, a breeze sweeps in and the wooden workers crumble, like ancient exhumed mummies, into dust. The Boss rushed to the nearest telephone where he calls up Will Hays for an explanation of this unconventional behavior, but Mr. Hays is in conference,

and the final shot of our short shows The Boss shaking the futile phone in the direction of the Sky.

**SOMETIMES** I think I have an idea. To illustrate what usually becomes of my ideas, I offer the following correspondence:

Advertising Manager: Time Magazine, 135 E. 42nd St.,

Dear Sir: For your circulation advertising around Christmas season I suggest the following slogan: "There is no time like the present and there's no present like *Time*." I hope that you will be able to use this, and remain, etc. The reply:

Dear Sir: I appreciate the interest in *Time* which prompted you to send us the slogan—"There's no time like the present and there's no present like *Time*." I agree with you that this is a swell slogan and it may interest you to know that we used it in much of our Christmas promotion from 1926 to 1928. Cordially, P. I. Prestice, Circulation Manager."

**WHEN**, on September 26th, the news was out that France intended going off gold, the Russian State Bank gave orders to sell one million pounds sterling on the New York exchange "at best", which means at any price. The idea behind this move may have been one of many, but local financiers believe that Russia probably intended to hedge against any decline which might have resulted from the devaluation of the franc. Whatever may have been the motive, the pound fell as a consequence of this offer from \$5.02 to \$4.91, at about which point the United States Treasury applied the Exchange

Equalization Fund to the purchase of Russia's sterling, thus living up at once to the gentlemen's agreement which had only just been made between France, England and ourselves.

With this support the pound returned to \$5.02 and then, in unofficial transactions after the close of the market rose to \$5.12. Secretary of the Treasury Morgenthau told the reporters about it. "We bought," he said, "at a price which gives the United States Government a handsome profit." Perhaps the Soviets, having long since decided that they could get along better without money, have lost the knack of trading in currency. A man who abandoned the game of poker twenty years ago because he thought it was the root of all evil, is likely to make a fool of himself if he sits down to a continuous game among a lot of rapacious professionals and asks for a stack of blue chips.

### Box-Office Behavior

**BOX-OFFICE** grosses continue to soar throughout the country. *Motion Picture Daily*, New York, reports that first-run houses reached a new four-year high Labor Day week, taking in a total of \$2,090,144. That paper also notes that the number of first-run houses has increased from 122 on Labor Day, 1933, to 173 this year, with a total increased gross of \$725,039. During the last part of September Universal's *My May Godfrey* was easily the best patronized of any attraction in the key cities. It was held over for two and three weeks in numerous houses. *Variety* reported its business in Minneapolis, "a real sock, hitting a tremendous \$15,500 the first week," at the Orpheum. In Kansas City, Pittsburg, San Francisco and Chicago, *Godfrey* more than doubled the average gross in the houses where it played, according to the *Motion Picture Daily*.

In cities where it is being released at popular prices, *The Great Ziegfeld* is doing a surprising business considering it played earlier in the year at road show prices. *Variety* tells us that in Minneapolis *Ziegfeld* was a failure at \$1.65, but at the popular 40 cent admission, the customers flocked into the Minnesota theatre to the tune of \$14,000 the first week, doubling the amount taken in during a two-week road show period. Another one that is showing strength is *Anthony Adverse*. Washington, Chicago, Cleveland, Seattle and Portland, Oregon were cities doing far better than average business, according to figures gathered by *Motion Picture Daily*. *Dodsworth*, highly praised by the critics, was getting off to a good start in the early showings. There are many predictions that Goldwyn has a big box-office winner in this one.

Just as an isolated instance of box-office behavior, it is interesting to note that *Two in a Crowd*, a Universal picture, starring Joan Bennett and Joel McCrea, and directed by Al Green, was the leader in Boston the first week it showed there, grossing \$20,000 in a house that averages \$11,000. In Pittsburg, which was one of the first cities to get a look at *Ramona*, only mild business was reported. Other pictures that are helping to swell the grosses are: *The General Died at Dawn*, *The Gorgeous Hussy*, *Swing Time*, *Give Me Your Heart*, *The Road to Glory* and *Girls' Dormitory*.

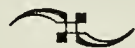


David Broekman

MUSICAL DIRECTOR

KHJ

Don Lee Broadcasting System



## Readers Write

### He Fies At Us

To the Editor:

Fie, fie, Mr. Beaton!

"When Mr. Shakespeare penned his lines about the play being the thing," he was, as ever the most cursory glance at his script will show you, referring to his plan to "catch the conscience of the king."

It's a lot of tripe, all this talk about "the play's the thing," as a great mot set down by "The Bard"—when the quotation is only half a quotation.

Probably the same peole who make this error are those who go about announcing that "ignorance is bliss," when as a matter of fact "where ignorance is bliss it were folly to be wise."

Though this letter is unsigned—for the reason that one can speak more freely thereby—it actually comes from one who considers the SPECTATOR the only intelligent film publication—but judging from your estimate of the filmentality, perhaps that is not the compliment it is meant to be.—Hollywood.

(From Hollywood SPECTATOR, November 9, 1935: "The play's the thing," of course, but the rest of the quotation gives that portion of it meaning: "wherewith to catch the conscience of the King." No matter how good the play is in itself, it fails of its purpose if it does not catch the fancy of the audience.)

### Her Thanks for a Review

To the Editor:

I never write fan letters, but when another friend phoned me this morning and told me how very grateful she was to me for telling her of the *Song of China*, I felt I should give the credit to you.

I live in the Hotel Durant, right at the door of the U. C. Campus, Berkeley, and so many things come to the University and the Campus Theatre that unless there is something special we do not always pay attention to notices. However, when *Life Long Learning*, published in Berkeley, August 24th, was put in my box, I glanced over it and saw what Welford Beaton, editor of the HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR, said of the *Song of China*. I mentioned it to a number of my friends because I knew you, and felt you would not recommend a play so highly were it not worth while. Those who did not see it are all hoping it will return and wondered if the Campus might not have it later.

The picture charmed and delighted us all. A friend who has just come back from China could not praise it highly enough. It is truly all and more than you said and I wanted to thank you for writing it up in such a way that made me want to see it myself and do what I very seldom do, suggest my friends seeing it, too.—Dora Lawrence Cameron.

### Peace and Our Youth

To the Editor:

Your editorial suggesting that the film industry turn its attention to peace as a subject for story material, was of particular interest to me. A statement made by H. G. Wells—"The unarmed Canadian frontier is perhaps the most hopeful line in the political geography of the world"—so fired my imagination that I have been obsessed with the idea of writing a motion picture story around it. After trying in vain to fan into flame an interest in the subject in the hearts and minds of two film companies, I resolved to have the real thing—that is, a real "assembly" of the youth of the United States and Canada, at the International Peace Park on the border.

Rear Admiral Byrd thinks the idea an excellent one, and hopes to do something about it later. You may not know that the Admiral's physician ordered him to take three months complete rest. He has never entirely recovered from the effects of the fume poisoning he received at Advance Base.

At this "Assembly"—which Admiral Byrd suggests should be held shortly after school closes next summer—we plan to take the thrilling trappings of war; drums, martial music, the tramp of marching feet; all those things that thrill any normal per-

## MARSHA HUNT

Hollywood Boulevard  
Accusing Finger  
Easy to Take

Now Making  
College Holiday

## RAY ENRIGHT

WARNER BROS.

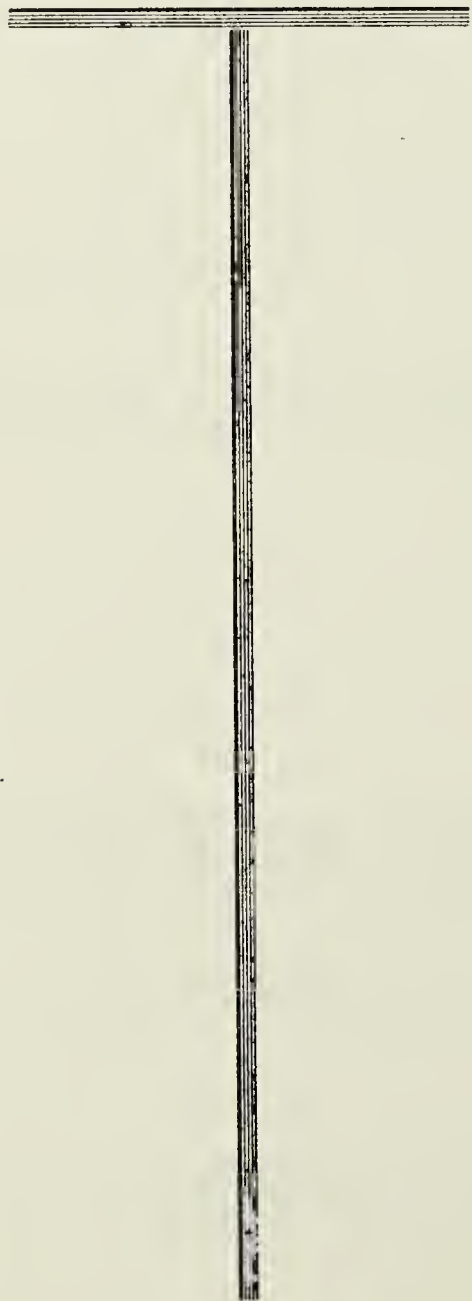


# ROY DEL RUTH

Directing

BORN TO DANCE

for Metro Goldwyn Mayer



son; and use them to promote the spirit of FUN and GOOD-WILL. Dorothy Canfield Fisher has said, "Only when youth can find peace as thrilling as war will youth devote itself to the maintenance of peace."

We hope to make the ceremonial part of this gathering majestic and soul-stirring, with no slightest trace of mediocrity, or maudlin sentimentality. I am telling you this because I am interested in knowing what you think of the idea.

Julian Huxley says that the science of psychology can be enlisted in the service of peace just as other sciences are enlisted in the service of war, so it would seem to be important that the affair be planned in such a way as to get the desired psychological effect.

Nominated for the "Toward a More Picturesque Speech" page of the *Readers Digest*: "as strings in a mighty harp quivering with a rhapsody of hues." See HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR, April 25, 1936, page 7.—*Mabel Keefer, Amsterdam, New York.*

## Endorses Spectator's Stand

To the Editor:

As a life-member of two anti-cruelty societies and occasionally a modest contributor to several others, I thank and bless you for your sane, kindly words in behalf of our brothers the animals—i.e. your quoted soul-stirring comments about the unspeakable film, *Bengal Tiger*, (*Motion Picture Review Digest* 7/27/36). Your lone voice, amid all the other heartless comments "for children" (forsooth); even by the alleged reform groups. I have had my opinion of these worthies all along. But their approbation of this damnable film proves their hypocrisy and perhaps something worse. Your kindly words reminded me of the Bible "and the light shineth in the darkness." It is so good to meet (if only at times) a brother in compassion and conscience for the weaker ones. Your constructive suggestion of invoking the offices of the S.P.C.A. is splendid.

I appealed anent this film and another similar one to the N.Y.S.P.C.A. but only received a courteous and most discouraging reply from Mr. Sidney Coleman—it could only stop cruelty in the making (*if reported*); no authority to prohibit showing a cruel film! He actually asked me to visit the serial and write a report of it. Not only would I faint at the horrors; but imagine my helping to fill their blood-stained coffers!—*Helen King, 310 East 118th Street, New York.*

## Not Quite Convinced

To the Editor:

Your editorial on Jerome Kern in the issue of July 4th interested me very much. I saw the interview in the Times and was rather amazed at what Mr. Kern had to say for the stage and screen. For a good many years Mr. Kern has been able to turn out very original, interesting and charming tunes, and that seems to be 99% of his value to the stage and screen. As long as he turns out tunes of that kind I fail to see why he must have such a vast knowledge of the theatre. Suppose he doesn't know the difference between Second order and Olio; he writes a great song; many a good property man doesn't know the difference between Segue and Tacet.

You mention a Continuous Score for dramatic pictures. I wonder if you mean from the Main Title to the finish of the picture. My feeling about dramatic music for the screen is a good bit like the way I feel about the use of such instruments as the celeste, triangle and bells in the orchestral music; the great value is the Entrance. I was once kicked off a radio program because I made fun of the sponsor's idea of having the celeste play the theme song as a background to all the advertising talk. It happened that the theme song was a old timer and the sales talk was meant for old people. Most of the old people I saw listening to the program hummed or sang the theme song and very likely forgot or never even learned what the sponsor was selling. Which brings me around to the picture *Under Two Flags*. The musical background was a good job but must have been an overnight affair. *Pale Hands, I Loved* was used a great deal and in the theatre where I saw the picture there were any number of people humming the tune every time it was used. I couldn't help thinking of the pianist in a theatre back home who always

cued desert scenes by playing *When the Sands of the Desert Grow Cold*, and at times turned the movie house into a community sing.

All of which is very rambling and away from my point. I feel as you do about good dramatic music; no attention would be paid it by the audience. But a continuous score, I wonder.—Thos. Griselle, Hollywood.

### Doing a Community Service

To the Editor:

A year ago, through the courtesy of a friend, I became a second-handed subscriber to the SPECTATOR. That is, each month I received her copy when she had finished reading it. She lately passed away, and when my children (I have three) learned they no longer would receive the SPECTATOR, they entered a strong protest. It appears that they have supplemented your subscribers' list by about twenty neighborhood young people who eagerly read each copy, especially the reviews of current pictures, and select the pictures they think worth seeing according to what your reviews have to say about them. Twenty children aren't a lot, of course, but if I can be the instrument that will help many growing youth to attend only worthwhile pictures, I shall consider my missionary work worth while. Therefore, I enclose a money-order for five dollars to pay for a year's subscription beginning with the last issue, which we have not yet received.—(Mrs.) Jane Withrow Adams, Detroit, Michigan.

### Another for Peace

To the Editor:

I have recently learned of the challenge which you have given to the film industry, a challenge to turn its attention to world peace, to develop some really powerful pictures along these lines.

I believe with all my heart that there is nothing so important today as world peace, and that without peace we might just as well drop all our efforts towards better housing, social security, and all the finest things of appreciation in art and literature. For of what use these if war is again to drag them down?

Because of my belief I was the more stirred to read of your editorial, and I want to extend to you my deepest appreciation for your action. In your position of great influence as publisher of the SPECTATOR and as the greatest authority on the motion picture, your words should mean much to the cause of peace.

Again, I thank you! Please use your power more and more.—Charles P. Jervey, Hartford, Conn.

Eyes Examined  
and Glasses Fitted

HEmpstead 8438

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OPTOMETRIST

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for

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER



★ ★ ★

**AL JOLSON**

**PAUL MUNI**



**PAT O'BRIEN**

**JAMES STEWART**



*Hollywood*

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CENTS

# SPECTATOR

Eleventh Year

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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Volume II

NOVEMBER 21, 1936

No. 17

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*Let's Have a Rousing Song  
of Prosperity!*

*What Law Regulates Length  
of Features?*

*How Hollywood Can Develop  
Story Material*

*We Make a Visit to Canine  
and Equine Actors*

.... REVIEWS ....

WINTERSET \* \* BORN TO DANCE \* \* PENNIES FROM HEAVEN

LOVE ON THE RUN \* \* GO WEST, YOUNG MAN \* \* MAD HOLIDAY

THE PLOT THICKENS \* \* CAN THIS BE DIXIE? \* \* HIDEAWAY GIRL

ONE WAY PASSAGE \* \* REUNION

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ALL COMMENT \* \* \* HOLLYWOOD'S OLDEST FILM PUBLICATION \* \* \* NO GOSSIP

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*Compliments to  
Welford*



MARK SANDRICH



WALDEMAR  
YOUNG

*Screen Playwright*



Under Contract  
to  
Paramount



EDWARD  
LUDWIG

DIRECTED

ADVENTURE IN MANHATTAN





From the

# Editor's Easy Chair



**WHAT** other inspirations *The Era* may have had in its hundred years of existence as England's leading amusement paper, I do not know, but it certainly voiced a bang-up one in the issue just to hand. "Let's Have a *Tipperary* of Prosperity!" it clamors in a bold-face-type heading over an article which goes into the matter at length. Raymond Bennett, writer of the article, starts with: "If there was one thing the audience could and did do in the great days of the music halls, it was to join in." He ends with: "The stage is set and the audience is ready for a *Tipperary* of peace-time prosperity, and I don't think it will come via America." And America has a grand opportunity to show Bennett he doesn't know what he is talking about and at the same time to confer a favor on the whole wide world by giving it an opportunity to sing its way back into another epoch of good times.

**COMMUNITY** singing is the indulgence of a fundamental human complex. I do not know why a bunch of fellows enjoy draping their arms over one-another's shoulders and inharmoniously bellowing out the sweetness of Adeline, but I know they do it and thoroughly enjoy it. It is in response to some inner yearning I suppose a psychologist could explain. Apparently it thrives on alcohol, for ensemble singing is an inevitable step in the forward progress of any convivial party. But it is its sober aspects with which we are engaged now. To start with, we have the fact that a crowd will break into song upon the slightest provocation. Nations have sung their way into and out of wars. Community singing welds individual emotional yearnings into a united force which perhaps can not initiate a movement, but which certainly can spur its forward progress. The world today is emerging from the only war in history which affected directly every hole and corner of it—the War of the Depression. On the Road Back a song we all can sing would lighten our steps and make the pace faster. We do not want to sing *Happy Days Are Here Again*; it refers to something else, to a yesterday's problem long since settled; but we want its sentiment expressed in new words and set to a new, swinging melody that all can sing.

**AND** there is where the film industry comes in. It has the only medium which can bring the words of the song to the eyes, and the music to the ears, of the entire world. The only great industry which does a strictly cash business, it is the first to reap benefits from improve-

ment in business conditions, its box-offices the first to hear the clink of coins denoting freer spending. It, therefore, would be the first to profit from the enlivening effect of a peace-time *Tipperary*. Its various units could well afford to join in the production of a short subject giving the words and music of a prosperity song. It could afford to dangle a large check before the eyes of lyricists and composers to compete for. It could afford to pay Lawrence Tibbett a handsome sum for using his vibrant personality and glorious voice to lure audiences into joining in. And it could afford to share the expense of providing exhibitors with the film without cost if it would take too long to sell it to them. I do not suggest it as a philanthropic, patriotic gesture. It is cold cash business. We have, to start with, the desirability of expediting the return of prosperity and the fundamental fondness of humans to raise their voices in united song. It merely is a proposition of joining the two. By all means, let's have a *Tipperary* of prosperity!

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**THINGS** have a habit of happening. For the last issue of the SPECTATOR I wrote a ponderous indictment of the film industry for not encouraging the creation of its own source of story material, exploited it on the front cover as being among the jewels of wisdom to be found inside, proceeded to make up the paper and forgot to put it in. It is somewhere in this issue. That is, I think it is. I guarantee nothing. If my memory makes a liar of the front cover, it is something which concerns only the two of them, and I refuse to be held responsible for the conduct of either.

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**THE** film industry seems to take pleasure in making its job as hard as possible. Simplicities of life form its greatest source of story material, yet its constant search is for complexities of epic significance, for great themes involving nations, and great humans far removed from those with whom we rub elbows. If I were making pictures, I would let Warners have their Danton and the French Revolution if I could have Ann Shirley and a mongrel dog. One could make a greatly human picture about a girl like Ann and her love for a little dog who loves her, a picture that would get into the hearts of all of us because it would be but a variation of the lives we lead. The trend of screen entertainment now is getting farther from its audience and is putting producers to unnecessary expense in trying to outdo one another in building their pictures on a constantly increasing scale of mag-

nitude. Any ordinary human emotion is better screen material than famous figures or great events in history.

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**T**HE film industry seems to be suffering from intellectual stagnation. Of 344 features released between January first and October first this year, less than one in three has grossed normal business or over, according to the authentic figures of *National Box-Office Digest*, Norman Webb's valuable statistical publication. There really is no excuse for any picture's failure to do at least normal business. The reason for it is the producers' habit of ignoring their medium and giving all their thought to their story material. Apparently they are laboring under the impression that they can make the screen interesting by having players recite stories, thus making the microphone more important than the camera in an art which in its true form is pictorial, not vocal. Such literate translation of stories to the screen of necessity demands story material strong enough to be entertaining irrespective of contributions by the medium itself. But if Hollywood would approach its task from the standpoint of the camera and regard dialogue as what it is, purely an incidental element to be used sparingly to expedite the telling of a story, it would find that the present ratio of successes to failures would be reversed. I have written if so often, but I will write it again: In all arts it is the medium which entertains, the medium's method of presenting the material, not the material itself. The papers tell us that Jeff Lazarus, Paramount's story chief, is on a pilgrimage to New York in desperate search for story material. In Hollywood are hundreds of writers capable of supplying Paramount with all the *screen* stories it needs, but such stories are not what it is looking for. It is looking for stories expressed in a medium alien to its own, for books and plays it can reduce to dialogue and photograph players reading it.

**A**NOTHER evidence of the film industry's mental stagnation is its conviction that, no matter how long a story may be in its original form, it must be stretched to feature length when told on the screen. Constantly we are seeing pictures with only enough story content to last through three or four reels of consistent telling, being padded with deplorable "comedy relief," extraneous chatter, meaningless scenes, apparently in the belief the audience would walk out if a picture did not attain a certain length. Can anyone tell me why a story which could be told in three, four or five reels, must be told in six, seven or eight? Would a producer be disgraced forever if he started to tell a story and stopped when he had told it, even if the end came in the middle of reel four? And are producers and exhibitors oblivious to the fact that if each picture were given the footage its story content called for, the present long programs, due to the ruinous dual-bill policy, could be cut in half and still contain as much story value as they have now?

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**F**ROM the SPECTATOR's review of *The Magnificent Brute*: "We leave the theatre with the raucous laughter of Vic McLaglen ringing in our ears. It is an offense without meaning, as there is nothing in the clos-

ing scene to justify the harsh bellowing." From *Time's* review of the same picture: "Most tedious noise: McLaglen's guffaw." The national news weekly puts it in a nutshell.

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**O**NE of the main things about the film industry that bewilders me is why it does nothing to encourage the development of a literature of its own. Even the dullest producer must realize what a saving it would effect in production cost, must realize we will not get a steady stream of wholly satisfactory pictures until first there is a steady stream of wholly satisfactory stories from which to make them. Hollywood should not buy stories as such. It should buy motion picture scripts in which the stories are told in a succession of scenes the camera can record; it should read motion pictures, not literary efforts. *Daily Variety* reports that only forty per cent of the stories purchased by the film industry ever are made into pictures. If Hollywood purchased only motion pictures on paper, such an inexcusable waste of money would be avoided and it would get scripts from which better pictures could be made. "Where will one get the writers to supply us with such scripts?" is the question—an exceedingly stupid one—I am asked whenever I bring up the subject in a conversation with a producer. The aviation industry would not have progressed very far if it had stopped to ask where it was going to get pilots. It just went ahead establishing a demand for pilots and the supply took care of itself. If the film industry announced it hereafter would buy only what virtually were shooting scripts, the best creative brains in the literary world would soon be turning out so many that the best could be secured for a fraction of what is paid now for books and plays. Metro pays Fannie Hurst one hundred thousand dollars for a book from which it will extract a motion picture story. If the story had been written directly for the screen, do you imagine the studio would have paid more than a tenth of that sum for it? Silly to ask. An author can make more money from the screen by ignoring its existence than can be made by taking the time to study its requirements. In no other industry in the world can be found such a ludicrous situation. And in no other industry in the world are there such gigantic salaries as the film industry pays those responsible for the situation.

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**O**NE of the many puzzling things about this funny motion picture business is the film industry's failure to profit by experience. Apparently it lacks an analytical sense. Why is this picture a success? Why is that one a failure? The story is not a determining factor. *My Man Godfrey*, with an absurd, wholly unbelievable story, has a better box-office record than *Gorgeous Hussy*, *Magnificent Obsession*, *Under Two Flags*, *Tale of Two Cities*, each of which has a powerful story. The star is not a determining factor. The latest figures compiled by Norman Webb show Clark Gable to be the greatest current individual money-making star, being third on the list headed by two teams, Astaire and Rogers first, and Eddy and MacDonald second. *San Francisco*, a Gable picture, heads the box-office list. Another, *Wife Versus Secretary*,

is ninth on the list. Still another is *Cain and Mabel* in which Gable co-stars with Marion Davies. Its place on the list is fifty-ninth. If the star made the picture, those in which Gable appears would be in one-two-three order in the box-office rating. No one can challenge the decision of the box-office. All pictures are aimed at it, and their success can be measured only in terms of the accuracy of their aim. With both stories and stars thus eliminated as determining factors in box-office achievement, we have left only the manner in which both are presented, the manner in which the motion picture medium is utilized in the presentation.

**T**HE two greatest money-makers among pictures released during the past twelve months are *San Francisco* and *Mutiny on the Bounty*. The first seven have big productions, the others being, in order, *Great Ziegfeld*, *Follow the Fleet*, *Rose Marie*, *Swing Time*, *Anthony Adverse*. The first big little picture is *My Man Godfrey*, eighth on the list. I had to go a long way down the list before I found a picture I can recall as having failed to stick steadfastly to its job of telling its story. It is the one thing the leaders among the 342 listed have in common, obviously, then, being the determining factor in success or failure. This would tend to prove what the SPECTATOR steadfastly has maintained during the eleven years of its existence—that the manner of telling is more important than the story or who appears in it. But producers think differently. Their search is for stories and personalities only. They make no effort to gain an understanding of the fundamental principles of their medium, nor do they provide means for others to gain such understanding. There are institutions which teach the basic principles of steel making, but none fostered by the film industry which teach the basic principles of motion picture making. In the past year's SPECTATORS are reviews of scores of pictures which are lamentable exhibitions of their makers' lack of ordinary screen common sense, yet I have not seen one during the year whose story could not have been made into a thoroughly satisfactory example of screen entertainment that would have done well at the box-office.

**T**HE greatest single bit of evidence of producer ignorance is the obsession for breaking the continuity of audience interest in the story by interpolations designed to provoke laughter in spots in which the whole strength of the scenes depended upon the preservation of their mood. I make reference to a case of this sort in the review of *Hideaway Girl* in this issue. It is a murder mystery picture whose success as screen entertainment naturally would depend upon the closeness with which it sticks to its job of being a murder mystery. But Paramount has on its pay-roll, in the person of Martha Raye, a comedienne who attracted attention in a previous picture. Her asset is a talent which Paramount completely fails to recognize, and her liability an unmusical voice in which she shouts songs. Because she attracted attention she is stuck on the outside of the murder mystery story, although her contributions are as foreign to it as Jonah's whale would be. When the story finally clammers through the distractions she offers and is commanding some attention

to itself by promising to clear up the mystery—always the high dramatic point of such a picture—the scene is interrupted twice by the young woman's prancing in and adding some more shouts to the long series preceding it. Surely if Paramount could not figure out for itself the folly of such interpolations, it at least could have analyzed the leading box-office pictures and been governed by its findings. It would have found that those pictures did not resort to "comedy relief" in an effort to commit suicide. As an example of screen art, *Hideaway Girl* could have shared with *San Francisco* the greatest single factor in the latter's success—the power to keep continuous the audience's interest in the story as it unfolded. It is such a simple thing to accomplish that there really is no excuse for any picture's failure to please an audience.

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**S**TRANGE that a picture as well made as *Gay Desperado* should steal an idea we still can remember as a feature of a Paramount production made a few years ago and which brought George Raft to the attention of the public for the first time. You will recall that in all his scenes he continually tossed up a coin and caught it. In *Desperado* there is a young fellow who somewhat resembles Raft. He tosses up a coin and catches it all the time he is on the screen, a palpable steal and rather a cheap one.

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**W**HEN Lawrence Tibbett came to pictures he brought a magnificent voice, a dynamic personality and a widely exploited name. Nelson Eddy and Nino Martini came later, neither excelling Tibbett in voice or acting, and not nearly as widely exploited. To-day Eddy, teamed with Jeanette MacDonald, is second in the list of box-office favorites, and Martini is becoming popular. Metro has put the MacDonald-Eddy team in pictures worthy of their talents. *The Gay Desperado* was tailored to fit Martini; it is worthy of his standing in the world of opera. After being absent from the screen for a considerable interval, Tibbett comes back in one of Sol Wurtzel's poor class B pictures. Superbly endowed in every way to be the central figure in an imposing production, *Under Your Spell* presents him as the hero of an unbelievable yarn in which he is chased across the country by a silly girl. A high light is a courtroom sequence too serious to be farce and too absurd to be drama. We constantly read that the film industry is searching desperately for star material, and here we have one producing company reducing a potentially great star to the status of a dual bill leading man. As I viewed *Under Your Spell* I absolved the writer of the screen play of responsibility for the story weaknesses. I was interested in noting that Frances Hyland constructed a technically able screen play with the material at her command.

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**O**NE argument repeatedly advanced in defense of the film industry's wholesale surrender to the microphone and its abandonment of the story-telling technique upon which its prosperity had been founded, was that prior to the advent of the talkies, silent pictures were dying on their feet, and that sound came just in time to save the industry's life. Without doubt the pictures offered the

public in the last few years of the wholly silent screen were on the whole rather poor specimens of screen entertainment, but you will recall that during that period the minds of the producers were on Wall Street and stock tickers and the turning out of pictures became an automatic grind which could produce only uninspired product. But let us go back a few years before the advent of talkies and examine some official government figures which show the average weekly attendance at motion picture theatres in the United States from that time until the present. If there be any virtue in the argument that only a revolution in the nature of its product saved the industry's life, the figures will have to show a falling off in attendance toward the end of the silent era. But here are the figures:

Average Weekly Attendance at U. S. Film Theatres:	
1922.....40,000,000	1929.....95,000,000
1923.....43,000,000	1930.....110,000,000
1924.....46,000,000	1931.....75,000,000
1925.....48,000,000	1932.....60,000,000
1926.....50,000,000	1933.....60,000,000
1927.....57,000,000	1934.....70,000,000
1928.....65,000,000	1935.....80,000,000

The first column is the record of the closing years of silent and part-sound pictures; the second column is the record of all-talkie product, a record, however, written partly by the depression. It is interesting to note that silent pictures were showing a steady increase in popularity, making more money for their producers each year. These official government figures would indicate the film industry would have got along all right if it had stuck to its business of making motion pictures instead of going into that of photographing stage technique.

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**WRITES** Gilbert Seldes, one of the recognized screen authorities: "The movies are not making nearly enough money; they should yield a third more profit. As for the art, we shall have better pictures only when the producers learn how to attract all their potential patrons." And they will not attract all their potential patrons until they learn how to make better pictures which recognize the fact that there is an art of the screen.

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**ORDINARILY** I permit time and chance to fulfil any desire I may have to meet personally some player whose performances on the screen have given me the impression that acquaintance with him or her would prove agreeable. There is one gentleman, however, whom my desire to meet has been growing ever since I saw him on the screen some months ago, finally growing so strong that I yielded to it, journeyed to his home in San Fernando Valley and asked if I might be permitted to make his personal acquaintance, offering as an excuse only my admiration for him as a personality and a screen artist. Being told I would be received, I followed Carl Spitz through several gates until I came into the presence of Buck, the magnificent Saint Bernard of *Call of the Wild* and other films, and the artist I wished to meet personally. Following the introductory ceremony, marked by my unsuccessful attempt to register as great a degree of dignity as Buck displayed, I had a long chat with Carl

about his method of developing dogs into motion picture actors. What I wanted to know first was how long a dog had to live with an actor before appearing in scenes in which he had to sustain the impression that he really was the actor's dog. Buck meanwhile had wandered off on a sniffing expedition, at no time having shown the slightest interest in my existence. Carl called Buck back, then told me to walk around the yard and to pay no attention to the dog. Buck looked intently at Carl, Carl gave a slight signal with his hand, I walked away and Buck followed me wherever I went, caressingly rubbing his body against my leg, lifting his great head to look up at me, giving a perfect performance of a dog registering love for his master. That suggested another interesting question: How would Carl get Buck to cease being my dog? I stopped in front of Carl and asked it, Buck sticking to me and showing no interest in his owner. Carl tossed a pebble a dozen feet in front of me. "Buck will follow you that far, then will return to me," he said, "That is what happened. In obedience to some signal Buck must have received when he was walking away from Carl, he abruptly ceased being my dog and again concentrated on his sniffing."

**WHEN** Carl gets a call for a dog, he does not know whether the canine actor is going to be asked to lie luxuriously in front of a fire, climb a ladder, chase a burglar or bite the villain. Every scene presents its own problem and Carl does not know what it is going to be, consequently he can not prepare the dog in advance to meet any demands to be made upon it. I asked him about that. "You're the director," Carl replied. "Tell me what you want Buck to do." I suggested that he take something from the top of a rustic table standing beneath a tree, go under the table with it, and stand there with it in his mouth. I realized that since sound came to Hollywood dogs can not be directed by word of mouth as in the silent days. Carl placed his hand on Buck's head and advanced with him to the table upon which a rolled up newspaper had been placed, pointed to the paper, which Buck picked up, and then pointed underneath the table. Buck dropped the paper and started to go under the table; Carl stopped him with a word, he picked up at the paper, and finished the routine. He went through it again rather dubiously, and with Carl's hand still on his head. Carl told me the usual practice was to rehearse a dog five times. At my suggestion he let Buck go it alone after the two rehearsals. The dog advanced by himself to the table, sniffed the paper and went under the table without it. Another rehearsal, and then Buck went through the routine without faltering, performing after three rehearsals with assurance and speed. Carl informed me that never before had Buck been called upon to do anything like it. He has no trick dogs, he told me, only actors who would do anything reasonable after the five rehearsals, and that, I thought, is about all we expect from human actors. The day I visited the Carl Spitz place on Riverside Drive in San Fernando Valley there were upwards of one hundred dogs in the kennels, a number of actors, some boarding, some being put through what is called the "companionship course"—house-breaking, coming when called, staying at heel; in short, gen-

eral obedience—a few, belonging to children, being taught simple tricks, sitting up, begging, rolling over, saying prayers, etc. We visited all of them in their remarkably clean, airy and comfortable kennels, and I found them to be a happy and contented lot. As a parting gesture the magnificent Buck acted as my dog again, even to the extent of following me into my car. When the act was over, I let him out the other side as he is too big to turn around inside.

**WHILE** in the Valley I dropped in on my brother, K.C.B., and talked airily of my intimate friend, Buck, and boasted of the things he had done for me alone. It developed that K.C.B. recently had made the acquaintance of some noted horses, and he boasted of their breeding and intelligence, finally agreeing to introduce me to them if I would stop talking about Buck. So we drove to the Rancho Cortez which is in process of being created into an establishment complete enough apparently to justify the management's claim for it as "America's finest training school for horses." In addition to preparing students for careers as motion picture actors, it educates jumpers, polo, show, stock, and trick horses. The first thing to impress me was the long, knotty-pine corridor upon which face two rows of commodious, airy and well lighted boxstalls containing aristocratic equines. Tom Bair, manager of the rancho, introduced me to the horses and also to Mark Smith, head trainer, for eight years with Barnes circus and for the past six years trainer of the Arabian horses which each week-end give exhibitions at the Kellogg ranch, where I've never been and don't know where it is. Anyway, Mark told me there was a vast difference between training dogs and training horses. I watched him conduct the kindergarten class composed of pupils who only one week before were three-four-, and five-year-old cross-bred horses running the range and never had a rope on them in all their lives. It is a question of patience, Mark said, of gentleness, of quietness of approach to make the spirited youngsters realize nothing was going to hurt them.

**THE** first lesson merely is to rope each pupil, speak soothingly to him, lead him around quietly for a few minutes, then turn him loose. Cowbell, (so named because on her native heath she was the one they used to rope, put a bell on, then let her loose in order that the location of the herd could be signalled by the bell) proved to be the most refractory pupil, the one which resisted capture most and yielded to it with the greatest reluctance. Once a horse gets it into its head that the trainer is an easy-going fellow who never inflicts pain, it learns with great rapidity. "Come back in thirty days," Mark told me, "and I'll call Cowbell by name out of the herd, she will nudge me with her muzzle, follow me around and respond to any reasonable request I make of her." Of interest to picture producers is the announcement of Tom and Mark that within a few weeks they will have a dozen head of blooded stock, six pure white, six pure black, that will go through a picturesque drill all by themselves; that they will have horses of every sort to do all sorts of things, in fact, a nicely trained, four-footed, oat-eating bunch of motion picture actors

awaiting calls. And of interest to picture people who ride, should be the information that Rancho Cortez is a splendid place to stable their saddle horses or learn how to ride them. The address is 13504 Hart Street, two blocks east of Woodman Avenue, Van Nuys. And I hope K.C.B. is satisfied that I have preserved a semblance of balance between his horses and my dogs.

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**WRITES** Louella Parsons, "This continued march of Westerns, Cecil de Mille's *Plainsman*, *The Texas Rangers*, and now *Sea of Grass*, proves that adventurous melodrama still ranks tops with our movie fans." Ten years ago the SPECTATOR lifted its young voice on behalf of the lowly Westerns, going so far as to say they should be the most important productions on the program of every studio; and during the decade the plea has been repeated many times. I have been told I harp too persistently on some of my phobias. I point to the Western revival and ask readers to be patient. It takes only ten years to get an idea into the heads of Hollywood producers.

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**FOR** sale, cheap: Figures, computations, summaries and conclusions, based on the *Literary Digest* and other polls, proving so conclusively that Landon was going to win the late presidential election, that we confidently put it in the form of a published prediction. Apply Editor, HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR.

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**WITH** as many level building lots as are available in Southern California, it seems strange that a steam shovel should be biting the top off a Hollywood hill I pass on my walk each morning, the idea being to get a row of four lots upon which a real estate firm will erect houses. The excavator is run by Abel Jorgenson, who tells me that if enough trucks were available he could bite out twelve hundred cubic yards of earth during one working day—three hundred truckloads. He told me that while he was sitting down, smoking his pipe, waiting for a truck. Abel, a stalwart, good looking young fellow, lives on Amherst Street and has four children, a girl 7, a boy 5, a girl 3, a boy 1, which indicates what a methodical person he is.

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**ON** the assumption that his long career as a New York stage producer equips him for the job, Earl Carroll comes to Hollywood to tell us how to make motion pictures. First thing one of our studios knows, it will make a mistake and give a job to someone who had a long career as a Hollywood picture producer.

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**PHIL SCHEUER** says in his *Los Angeles Times* review of *Hideaway Girl*, that Shirley Ross, the most pleasing feature of the picture, has lost her eyebrows. The casualties among feminine eyebrows have been terrific during the last year or two, and if our screen girls could realize how grotesque they look without them, they would stop mislaying them. I had noticed Shirley's funny appearance, but she looks like such a nice girl that I did not mention her eyebrowlessness in my review of *Hideaway Girl*. But something should be done about it, and if Phil will join me, I will share leadership with him in

a spirited campaign to encourage the cultivation of eyebrows by natural methods instead of by crayons. If our girls wish to see how sensible making-up improves their appearance, they should look at Joan Crawford in *Love on the Run* when it is released. Joan used to have a fancy for eccentric make-up. In her new picture there is no evidence of make-up and we see Joan as merely a beautiful woman, her eyebrows indigenous to the places they occupy.

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**W**ITH sympathetic consideration for my inclinations, motion picture producers did not schedule a preview on the evening of the day upon which the mailman delivered me my copy of the December issue of *Stage*, the handsome, intelligent and entertaining New York publication which so ably covers both the stage and the screen—a dispensation upon the part of producers which permitted me to spend an evening with my easy chair, my pipe, my dog, and *Stage*. Of all the New York screen writers whom I read, I find Katharine Best, screen editor of *Stage*, the most companionable reading because she approaches her subject with both sympathy and understanding. She makes no effort to impress us with the fact that she lives in a big city and we in Hollywood are villagers who do not know our way about. Her picture reviews, therefore, are intelligent and discriminating. Excellently written and gorgeously illustrated throughout, the December issue contains but one contribution which raised my dander. J. Edward Bromberg, an actor brought here from New York, writes a lot of silly rot about Hollywood and picture people. I have not met him, but I gather from his article that he would be a refreshing fellow to know. We have in Hollywood so few conceited asses with superiority complexes that Bromberg should serve as an entertaining diversion. A few pages farther on, however, my good nature was restored by my discovery of an excellent and extended article by Gene Lockhart in which he gives us his Hollywood. Because Gene is intelligent and knows how to express himself, because his purpose in writing was not to demonstrate what a brilliant fellow he is, his "Self Deflations" is a true and entertaining portrait of Hollywood as it is. *Stage* is a publication that should be on every Hollywood library table.

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**E**VERY studio has executives, writers and directors the size of whose salaries is justified by the assumption that they are the last word in picture wisdom. Every film turned out by these mammothly subsidized brains reflects, we must presume, their conception of what constitutes a perfect job. They are experts, and they should know. When, after a picture is previewed, the audience is departing, ushers hand out post cards upon which those who viewed the picture are invited to make suggestions as to its further improvement before it is released. The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, the stenographer, housewife, jeweler and auctioneer send in their cards, and the stupendously paid experts scan them eagerly. If the majority praises the picture, the experts are inordinately proud of themselves. If the general verdict is unfavorable, the experts look at the picture again and endeavor to doctor the spots which have been criticized

adversely. The whole thing makes one wonder upon what basis the size of the salaries is determined.

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**T**HE country does something to them. George Brent used to think it would be heavenly to live in a bungalow in the middle of Times Square, New York. At the Warner studio the other day he told me he hated to leave his San Fernando Valley home to go to work that morning, as the singing of the birds, the frolicking of his dogs, the chirps of his chickens, the perfume of his flowers, seemed vastly more important in the whole scheme of things than standing in front of a camera merely to make a motion picture. As for Times Square—well, if he lived until he wanted to see it again, he would be too old to make the trip.

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**A** RECENT *March of Time*, two-reeler included a fifteen-minute sketch of the progress of educational methods from the days of the primitive country school, with its strict adherence to the three R's, to the present time with its varied attractive courses to make children enjoy themselves while acquiring knowledge. It is a serious presentation with a running talk, and as it ended was accorded a generous outburst of applause. On the same bill was one of Metro's excellent *Crime Does Not Pay* series of short subjects, a serious sermon on the folly of crime and making no pretense at being anything else. It gripped the large audience, and it, too, was followed by a burst of applause. On the way home I thought of Hollywood's obsession for "comedy relief," its deep conviction that it is necessary to "make 'em laugh," an obsession that has ruined more screen presentations than it has helped, and which ignores the elemental desire of human beings to be taken seriously now and then, to be complimented by the implication that they occasionally like to think. It is all right to make us laugh, but it should not be carried to the extreme of making box-offices weep.

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**A**N automobile show is something we go to to make us discontented with the automobile we drove there in.

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**W**ESTERNS, if given the importance they deserve, could become the film industry's steadiest source of income. Mountains and plains, forests, deserts, glorious scenery of every sort convenient to Hollywood, can become the greatest box-office backgrounds pictures could have. Just imagine what a gold mine it would prove to Metro if Myrna Loy, Jean Harlow, William Powell and Spencer Tracy—the headliners of *Libeled Lady*—were involved in a plot worked out against the magnificent background that nature could provide, a picture in which they were tenderfeet mixed up with a lot of shooting cowboys.

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**A**SPIRING directors who cannot get a foothold in Hollywood might try India. *Moving Picture Monthly*, Bombay, gives that country's requirements: "Anybody who possesses a garrulous tongue to impose upon a Capitalist or a Studio Boss can be a Director in India. Failing to have a garrulous tongue one must have a friendship with a female star and a little knowledge in the story-telling."



# Some Late Previews

## Tense, Gripping Drama

**WINTERSET**, Radio release of Pandro S. Berman production. Directed by Alfred Santell; screen play by Anthony Veiller; from Maxwell Anderson's play; photographed by Peverell Marley; special effects by Vernon Walker; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate, Perry Ferguson; musical director, Nathaniel Shilkret; musical arrangement by Maurice De Packh; edited by William Hamilton. Cast: Burgess Meredith, Margo, Eduardo Ciannelli, John Carradine, Edward Ellis, Paul Guilfoyle, Maurice Moscovitch, Stanley Ridges, Willard Robertson, Mischa Auer, Myron McCormick, Helen Jerome Eddy, Barbara Pepper, Alec Craig, Fernanda Eliscu, George Humbert, Murray Alper, Paul Fix. Running time, 78 minutes.

**ONCE** again the screen invades the stage, photographs it and demonstrates the camera's ability to make drama more vivid on the screen than it ever can be made on the stage. The lack of aloofness is the screen's advantage over the older art. When we view *Winterset* on the screen, we are not sitting back, looking at it; we are accompanying its people into their scenes, looking into their eyes, overhearing their whispers. I have not seen *Winterset* on the stage, but among the multitude of stage productions I have seen were none which gripped me so completely and continuously as the screen presentation of the Maxwell Anderson play. It is a notable achievement, not in the screen's own field, but as an invasion of a field that is basically foreign to it.

RKO's production is not a motion picture and it will not appeal generally to the motion picture's wide audience. The producers went all the way in their adherence to the stage, bringing from New York the people who played the three most prominent parts there, Burgess Meredith, Margo and Eduardo Ciannelli, and rounding out the cast with talented players whose characterizations are portrayed admirably, but whose names lack box-office weight. The wider scope of the screen is reflected in the sweep of the production, even though most of the drama is confined to a single set. On the stage we would get an impression of Brooklyn Bridge; on the screen we see it. There are width and depth to the screen presentation impossible for the stage to achieve.

**THE** screen play of Anthony Veiller apparently adheres closely to the original and retains most of the Maxwell Anderson poetic dialogue. Many of Meredith's speeches are notable for their lyric quality and for the beauty of the thoughts they convey. Meredith's fine reading bringing out all their values. His performance is one of the most compelling I ever have seen on the screen. Margo is a remarkable young person. Nineteen years of age, she performs with emotional impressiveness any veteran might envy. She shares with Meredith the distinction of having a beautiful voice and skill in the use of it. Ciannelli on the screen is a stage villain of restrained vigor and chilling purpose, a splendid performer who keeps menace deadly. Paul Guilfoyle's characterization is a striking one, fully up to the standard set by the other members of the cast. As much can be said of Maurice Moscovitch and Edward Ellis, also of those to whom were assigned the lesser roles.

To Alfred Santell for his direction can go only the highest praise, to him goes credit for the restrained acting, nice balancing of characterizations, the intimacy sustained by the natural reading of lines. Whatever cinematic values the production reveals are due to his grasp of the possibilities of his story material and the masterly manner in which he realized them. Peverell Marley's skilful photography figures as an important element in the production. Music, too, plays an important part. Nathaniel Shilkret has given the presentation an intelligently sympathetic musical setting, at times as accompaniments underlying scenes, at times interpretative passages adding strength to scenes devoid of dialogue, the whole being one of the most helpful scores the screen has given us.

Pandro Berman has given us a remarkably compelling production, one which rates near the top of the list of the season's output, one you can not afford to overlook.

## It Is Practically Colossal

**BORN TO DANCE**, Metro production and release. Associate producer, Jack Cummings. Stars Eleanor Powell. Features James Stewart, Virginia Bruce, Sid Silvers, Una Merkel, Frances Langford, Raymond Walburn, Alan Dinehart, Buddy Ebsen, Georges and Jalna. Directed by Roy Del Ruth; screen play by Jack McGowan and Sid Silvers; from story by Jack McGowan, Sid Silvers and B. G. DeSylva; music and lyrics by Cole Porter; musical director, Alfred Newman; musical arrangements, Roger Edens; orchestrations, Edward Powell; choral arrangements, Leo Arnaud; dance ensembles, Dave Gould; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Joseph Wright and Edwin B. Willis; gowns by Adrian; photographed by Ray June; film editor, Blanche Sewell; marine adviser, Harvey S. Haislip, U.S.N.; musical presentations, Merrill Pye. Supporting cast: William and Joe Mandel, Juanita Quigley, Reginald Gardiner, Barnett Parker, J. Marshall Smith, L. Dwight Snyder, Jay Johnson, Del Porter (*The Foursome*). Running time, 105 minutes.

**METRO** comes to the front once more with a song and dance production which will please the world. Under the guidance of Jack Cummings as associate producer, it comes to the screen with sufficient pictorial dignity to justify him in hereafter calling himself John. *Born to Dance* is a parade of superlatively entertaining numbers, and as a review of it can be but a parade of differently worded superlatives, you can take my word for it now and skip to the next review, or go ahead with reading this one and see in how many different ways I can say the same thing.

To start with, the construction of the screen play is a clever bit of writing by Jack McGowan and Sid Silvers. (You will notice I am opening the review with a pair of Jacks.) The story is by Jack McGowan, Sid Silvers and Buddy DeSylva. (Now I have three Jacks and a pair of Sids.) In a picture of this sort what story there is serves only to knit things together, to reach out, so to speak, and grab the various musical and dance numbers which give it bulk. This one does the grabbing expertly and without allowing us to forget the minor note running through the whole thing is the story. It has a tripple-threat romantic element—Eleanor Powell and Jimmy Stewart, Una Merkel and Sid Silvers, Frances Langford and Buddy Ebsen, all refreshingly young, all outstandingly talented. Also outstanding are the music and lyrics by Cole Porter, the music tuneful and the lyrics more clever than you usually find in a production of this sort.

**T**HE preview audience which jammed Grauman's Chinese was generous with its applause throughout the entire showing. The outburst of greatest volume and longest duration was accorded the one scene which was the nearest approach in the picture to pure cinema, a perfect blending of visual entertainment and music. A feature song, *Easy to Love*, sung previously, was given a symphonic arrangement which was played spiritedly by a full orchestra—we see only a cop in a park directing it, his baton, arms, hands, facial expression fairly dragging the music from the instruments. Reginald Gardiner plays the cop and gives an amazingly clever example of the pantomimic art, one which both delighted and enthused the audience.

The delectable, agile and talented Eleanor Powell proves herself capable of carrying the load of star billing. Una Merkel, of course, is excellent. She always is and her popularity was attested by the hearty applause which greeted her first appearance on the screen. Frances Langford and Virginia Bruce please with both acting and singing, a song by Virginia being to me the vocal highspot of the production. Jimmy Stewart, one of my real favorites since I first saw him in *Rose Marie*, makes a big contribution to the picture, as does also Buddy Ebsen whose personality and acting ability would make him a big star if some intelligent producer would develop him. To Sid Silvers I bow in humble admiration. He collaborates in writing the story and screen play, sings, acts, dances, and makes love to Una Merkel, the last item on the list of his accomplishments being the one I would consider extremely easy.

**I**N distributing credit for the perfections of *Born to Dance*, an extremely large helping must be placed on Roy del Ruth's plate. A production of the sort, one composed of so many individual elements without interdependence, so easily could become jerky as a whole. Del Ruth skilfully smooths it out, keeps the story in sight, makes his cast feel at ease and give excellent performances. The players are young, and one of the production's greatest assets is the joyous spirit of youth which pervades it, and for that we can thank the director.

Cedric Gibbons and his associates excelled themselves in providing elaborate and artistically designed settings, and a word of commendation must be given Douglas Shearer for fine sound recording.

## Entertainment Par Excellence

**PENNIES FROM HEAVEN**, Columbia release of Emanuel Cohen production. Features Bing Crosby, Madge Evans, Edith Fellows and Louis Armstrong; directed by Norman McLeod; based on 'The Peacock Feather,' by Katharine Leslie Moore, and story by William Rankin; screen play by Jo Swerling; assistant director, Sam Nelson; photographed by Robert Pittack; music by Arthur Johnson; Lyrics by John Burke; song arrangements, John Scott Trotter; musical direction, George Stoll; film editor, John Rawlins; art director, Stephen Goosson. Supporting cast: Donald Meek, John Gallaudet, William Stack, Nana Bryant, Tommy Dugan, Nydia Westman. Running time; 90 minutes.

**Q**UESTION: How many pictures must we have like *My Man Godfrey*, *Theodora Goes Wild*, and now *Pennies from Heaven*, before Hollywood realizes that it is the motion picture medium and not the motion picture

story that makes a motion picture entertaining? The Manny Cohen offering has an impossible story just as *Godfrey* and *Theodora* have, yet it is one of the brightest pieces of screen entertainment we have had this year. Such stories, when presented intelligently, make successful screen material because of what they lack as stories. While producers are searching the world for powerful stories for literal translation on the screen, dramas which the camera merely records and which ask no cooperation from our imaginations, these three pictures, each with an absurd story, will clean up at box-offices everywhere. In spite of their incessant chatter, they more nearly approach pure cinema than any of the domestic problems, dramatic episodes or historical documents which the screen presents with such stolid, literate authenticity. All the latter ask of the audience is that it accept the shadows on the screen as real people, and grant the scenes a third dimension.

*Pennies from Heaven* and the other two give our imaginations a greater part to play. They ask us to imagine all the absurd things really could happen; we comply with the request, enter into the fun, and enjoy ourselves immensely. Ever since our imaginations began to feast on "Once upon a time there was a beautiful Princess," they have entertained us most when most was demanded of them. Motion pictures, unreal in all their elements, made the greatest demands, hence became the world's foremost entertainment medium. Silent pictures entertained us most because they left most to our imaginations. Talkies, more literate, have a harder time pleasing us, which would suggest the wisdom of their getting farther away from fact and indulging more in fancy.

**E**XCELLENT entertainment is provided by *Pennies from Heaven* because, by cooperating with it, we entertain ourselves. We accept Bing Crosby as a vagabond troubadour and ignore the suggestion of our minds that his manner of making a living is highly impracticable and, accepting him, we accept just as cheerfully everything that happens to him and to all those who come within the scope of his adventures. Only expert screen craftsmanship, of course, could make this possible, only the consistently sympathetic merging of all the elements, nice balancing of all the emotional appeals. Jo Swerling started it off with a screen play with cinematic virtues and sparkling wit. Norman McLeod contributed masterly direction distinguished for the engaging sense of humor it displays. Emanuel Cohen supplied an imposing production and Robert Pittack excellent photography.

And the cast was chosen with rare judgment. I first saw Bing Crosby in a songless two-reeler and wrote then that he had the making of a first-class actor if he never committed the folly of trying to act. As I watched his progress I always was more interested in him as an actor than as a singer, even though I like to hear him sing. In this picture his performance is flawless and his voice never pleased me more. Madge Evans, whose name always has been high up on my list of screen sweethearts, goes still higher by virtue of her big contribution to the picture. And Edith Fellows proves to be an amazing child. The story is about her, and she plays her big role with extraordinary skill and conviction. I was glad to see that fine

actor, Donald Meek, with a part he could get his teeth into. As a cheerfully irresponsible old man he is a delight. Louis Armstrong, a colored actor-musician, adds greatly to the fun. Nana Bryant, Tom Dugan, William Stack and John Gallaudet satisfy completely, and Nydia Westman does a scintillating bit. The even excellence of the performances is a tribute to the excellence of McLeod's direction.

## Delightful Tomfoolery

**LOVE ON THE RUN**, Metro production and release. Stars Joan Crawford and Clark Gable. W. S. Van Dyke production. Directed by W. S. Van Dyke; produced by Joseph L. Mankiewicz; screen play by John Lee Mahin, Manuel Seff and Gladys Hurlbut; from the story by Alan Green and Julian Brodie; musical score by Franz Waxman; recording engineer, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associate, Harry McAfee; gowns by Adrian; photographed by Oliver T. Marsh; film editor, Frank Sullivan. Supporting cast: Franchot Tone, Reginald Owen, Mona Barrie, Ivan Lebedeff, Charles Judels, William Demarest. Running time, 80 minutes.

**WHEN** I wrote my review of *Pennies from Heaven* I did not know I so soon was to see another picture with a crazy sort of story to point to in support of the contentions I advance in that review. *Love on the Run* is unbelievable but joyous, as satisfactory a piece of screen entertainment as one could wish for. It is mounted with that sumptuous good taste and regard for pictorial values we have learned to expect from Metro. The combination of Cedric Gibbons sets, Adrian gowns and Oliver Marsh photography is enough to make any picture worth looking at, and the story and acting in this one make it well worth listening to. Such a finished trio as Joan Crawford, Clark Gable and Franchot Tone can make us believe the unbelievable and entertain us with it.

Woody Van Dyke's direction is not up to his usual standard. Perhaps our most versatile director, his pictures maintaining an even level of excellence irrespective of the nature of the story material, we have grown to expect flawless jobs from him. In several dramatic scenes in *Love on the Run* he allows his characters to speak too loudly. Not only are they irritating to listen to, but they lack the increased dramatic effect they would have if the lines had been read in low, tense tones. Any extra can stand in front of a camera and shout lines. It takes an experienced artist to keep his voice down and make his lines dramatic. Carelessness in direction is evidenced in a sequence in which Gable and Tone, in room A, make no effort to subdue their voices so as not to be heard in room B, but during a break in their dialogue they hear clearly characters speaking in room B in ordinary tones. And Van Dyke makes no effort to space for laughs, which results in many lines being lost to the audience.

**BUT** in all other respects the direction is satisfactory, Van Dyke being equally at home with both drama and comedy. The story is a good piece of photoplay construction by a colony of writers whose names you will find above. It has everything in it, engaging romance, melodrama, hilarious comedy, farce, swift, action, all enacted with zest by the competent cast. Joan Crawford is delightful in all phases of her characterization, her well shaded comedy scenes being particularly effective. Gable

gives his standard performance and Tone reveals a discriminating flair for comedy. Donald Meek makes one sequence an outstanding feature of the production, his portrayal of a goofy watchman being a comedy gem. Reginald Owen is impressive as an international spy who provides the melodramatic element, his partner in crime being played with quiet impressiveness by Mona Barrie. Ivan Lebedeff appears for only a moment, but he makes the moment vivid.

*Love on the Run* is screen entertainment easy to take. Its strength lies in the weakness of its appeal to the intelligence of the audience. It is content with asking us only to have a good time with it, presenting no psychological problem demanding close attention. In our daily lives we have enough serious matters of our own to struggle with, and it is relief to find in a picture house such a clever bit of tomfoolery as Metro gives us in *Love on the Run*.

## Mae in Amusing Comedy

**GO WEST, YOUNG MAN**, Paramount release of Emanuel Cohen production. Stars Mae West. Directed by Henry Hathaway; original by Lawrence Riley; screen play and dialogue by Mae West; art director, Wiard Ihnen; film editor, Ray Curtis; photographed by Karl Struss; song sung by Mae West, *I WAS SAYIN' TO THE MOON*; words and music by Arthur Johnston and John Burke; music direction by George Stoll; gowns, Irene Jones. Supporting cast: Warren William, Randolph Scott, Alice Brady, Elizabeth Patterson, Lyle Talbot, Isabel Jewell, Margaret Perry, Etienne Girardot, Maynard Holmes, Alice Ardell, Nicodemus, Jack La Rue, G. P. Huntley, Jr., Robert Baikoff, Xavier Cugat and his orchestra. Running time, 82 minutes.

**CLEVERLY** weaving the West mannerisms into the story pattern, Lawrence Riley's play, *Personal Appearance*, gave Mae a vehicle which by the expert direction of Henry Hathaway has been made into the best picture in which she has appeared. Only in her first screen appearance did she entertain me. The last one released disgusted me, but I understand it was toned down after its preview. All her previous pictures were based on the belief there is box-office in vulgarity, and in their efforts to achieve it the pictures strained so hard against instincts of decency and restrictions of censorship boards that the star's undulating walk, method of speech and expressive eyes emphasized the suggestive element in the scenes. Riley's play capitalizes the walk, speech and eyes by making them legitimate features in a decent story that will offend no one.

In the role of a temperamental movie star Mae West is vastly amusing. It is a caricature, cleverly written by Riley and splendidly portrayed by Mae. Caricatures are permitted to exaggerate idiosyncrasies. Here we have them exaggerated beyond the point of belief that there is a movie star quite like the one the picture presents, one who could get such a vast wardrobe into the few bags she takes with her for a one-night personal appearance in Harrisburg, Pa., or who would wear so many stunning creations during a brief stop at a farm house; but it is all good fun, Mae makes the gowns charming and they reciprocate by revealing her physical charms; the play dialogue sparkles, the cast is a good one and the pro-

SAMUEL BISCHOFF



ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

The Charge of the Light Brigade

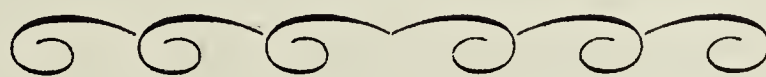




# MICHAEL CURTIZ

DIRECTOR

*The Charge of the Light Brigade*



duction is complete. One really could not expect much more.

**M**ORE than usually is the case with a screen story, this one emphasizes the importance of understanding direction. *Go West, Young Man* so easily could have been made just another noisy comedy. Its elements required nice balancing to make it emerge as entertainment for intelligent audiences. Hathaway achieves this. Riley gave him the ingredients and he compounded them well. In no scene was my obsession for naturally delivered dialogue given offense. The players talk like human beings, thus lending conviction to their scenes by not directing our attention from what is said to the manner in which it is said. The screen credits the star with having written some of the dialogue, which perhaps explains why it is freighted so heavily with praise of her devastating charms.

Four men are featured with the star, Randolph Scott, Warren William, Lyle Talbot and Jack La Rue. La Rue appears but briefly, Talbot has not much to do, William gets her in the end after Scott's narrow escape from her advances, done in the best Westian manner. I never have been impressed with William's acting, but in this picture he gives a really excellent performance. Scott, by never suggesting the actor, always is pleasing. It was good to see Alice Brady in a straight part not calling for incessant fluttering. Elizabeth Patterson is delightful in an old maid characterization. Isabel Jewell and Margaret Perry are capable in distinctly different roles. Music, under the direction of George Stoll, and photography by Karl Struss make valuable contributions to the general excellence of the offering.

### Three Rather Gay Murders

**MAD HOLIDAY**, Metro release and production. Produced by Harry Rapt. Features Edmund Lowe, Elissa Landi, Zasu Pitts, Ted Healy, Edmund Gwenn and Edgar Kennedy. Directed by George B. Seitz; screen play by Florence Ryerson and Edgar Allan Woolf; suggested by story, **MURDER IN A CHINESE THEATRE**, by Joseph Santley; musical score by Dr. William Axt; photographed by Joseph Ruttenberg; film editor, George Boemler; assistant director, Dolph Zimmer. Supporting cast: Soo Yong, Walter Kingsford, Herbert Rawlinson, Raymond Hatton, Rafaela Ottiano, Harlan Briggs, Gustav von Seyffertitz. Running time, 68 minutes.

**W**HILE I am a disciple of that school of thought which holds that four comedians to three corpses in a murder mystery picture is a ratio which tends to demean murder and lessen its importance as one of the most emphatic manifestations of our rather complex social structure, I feel that in justice to those who had a hand in the making of *Mad Holiday*, I must confess I derived entertainment from it and would not have felt cheated if I had had to pay for viewing it. Still, I maintain it might have preserved a better balance—say one comedian to one corpse. Murder is an act of exhibitionism, the indulgence of a whim by one with a tendency toward the gruesome. Detecting, on the other hand, is an intellectual diversion, an interesting problem in deduction, and there are those of us who adhere to the conviction that the progress of the deductive process should not be cluttered up with too many giggles. As *Mad Holiday* is basically a murder mystery, the murderous element could have been given

its relative importance by adding one of the comedians to the array of corpses. (I am in some doubt about the word "corpses." Although my dictionary is so huge it is mounted on wheels to make it mobile, I cannot find "corpses" in it.) However, as the main idea in my head as I sat down to write this morning was to tell you about the picture as I saw it, I suppose I had better get down to business.

**T**O George Seitz, director, goes credit for making it entertaining, for presenting the characters as natural humans who make no effort to impress us as actors. It is this quality of naturalness, the easy delivery of lines, the freedom from histrionics, that gives it appeal as a piece of entertainment. Edmund Lowe and Elissa Landi, the headliners, give satisfactory performances. Zasu Pitts is responsible for much laughter, and Harlan Briggs, as her husband, adds considerably to the mirth. Ted Healy again impresses me with his skill as a comedian. He works with a stooge, an aid he does not need and without which he would appear to even better advantage. Edgar Kennedy is prominent in the cast, but I wish he would give at least one performance in which he does not draw his hand across his face. I tired of that gesture half a dozen years ago. Edmund Gwenn, Herbert Rawlinson and Raymond Hatton also stand out. For a brief moment before he is transformed into the longest corpse, we get a glimpse of that very fine artist, Gustav von Seyffertitz, one of the most accomplished character actors available to pictures but whom we see but seldom.

**C. HENRY GORDON**

as

**Surat Kahn**

in

**The Charge of the**

**Light Brigade**

## Rather Dreadful Affair

**CAN THIS BE DIXIE?** 20th-Fox production and release. Sol M. Wurtzel, executive producer. Directed by George Marshall; screen play by Lamar Trotti; based on a story by Lamar Trotti and George Marshall; music and lyrics by Sidney Clare and Harry Akst; dances staged by Sammy Lee; photography by Bert Glennon and Ernest Palmer; art direction, Duncan Cramer; film editor, Louis Loeffler; costumes by Herschel; sound by Arthur von Kirbach and Harry M. Leonard; musical direction by Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Jane Withers, Slim Summerville, Helen Wood, Thomas Beck, Sara Haden, Donald Cook, Claude Gillingwater, James Burke, Jed Prouty, Hattie McDaniel, Troy Brown, Robert Warwick, Ferdinand Munier, Billy Bletcher, William Worthington, Otis Harlan. Running time, 66 minutes.

**T**HIS one will serve only to make its companion on a dual bill feel ashamed of the company it is keeping. Producers of these class B pictures protest to me that in estimating their values I should take into account their small budgets and short shooting schedules. Sol Wurtzel no doubt will claim he made *Can This Be Dixie?* under such handicaps. But they are handicaps which can explain only sins of omission, not sins of commission like those which this picture commits in every reel. Although Slim Summerville states within the hearing of a banker that he, Summerville, has no bank account, the banker accepts a check drawn on the Bank of England and signed by Slim, in payment of a debt owed by Claude Gillingwater. The locale of the story is down in Dixie. And thereafter the whole story is one of efforts to make the check good. What has either budget or shooting schedule to do with that?

The amount involved is five hundred dollars. It is a desperate situation. The banker—a Yankee skunk, by gad, Suh!—wants to marry the Southern belle, and unless the check is good she will marry the wretch to save her grandfather's Old Plantation, which is thickly populated with singing darkies. Someone's inspiration comes to the rescue. A train of wagons is hitched to an ancient automobile and sets out for New York in the hope of gaining a place on an amateur program for Jane Withers and the hundred or more negroes who ride on the wagons; then appear at some theatre and earn the necessary money. Where the money is to come from to feed the troupe and pay the expenses of the trip is not explained, apparently because the picture's budget and shooting schedule are limited.

**A**ND even that is not half of it. The northern migration and a lot of other things happen within the time it takes the banker to cable London and receive a reply that the check is not good! On the impoverished plantation, when all hope is abandoned, is staged the wedding of the disconsolate belle and the villainous banker on a scale that would cost a few thousand dollars, and as the knot is about to be tied, Jane Withers rushes in with five hundred dollars, and the only recourse of the banker is to gnash his teeth and plot fresh devilment which can come within the budget and shooting schedule. A thousand dollars is needed to enter a horse in a race to prevent the banker from seizing the whole plantation for some other debt that bobbed up from somewhere, and to earn it the old plantation home is transformed in a twinkling into an elaborate night club, even though the money

## JOHN J. HUGHES



### ART DIRECTOR

**Charge of the Light Brigade**

## FRED JACKMAN

**Special  
Photographic  
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**The Charge of the Light  
Brigade**

necessary to make the transformation would be more than the entry fee.

And then what do you suppose the dirty banker does? He closes the place because it has no license. He could do that within the budget and also save the schedule from shooting its continued existence. There is a lot more of it, absurdity piled upon absurdity until the irritation of the audience gives way to a feeling of sympathy for the players who are parties to the exhibition of picture making inefficiency. I do not blame the direction. George Marshall handled his story material as well as it could be handled. Too often reviewers charge a picture's weaknesses to its direction. This one has all the earmarks of a "head office" crime. And, of course, restricted budget and a limited shooting schedule. But will someone tell me why it costs more and takes longer to produce an ordinary intelligent picture than it does to make one that will not appeal even to the intelligence of a moron?

## Murder Not So Mirthful

**THE PLOT THICKENS**, RKO. Associate producer, William Siström; direction, Ben Holmes; story, Stuart Palmer; screen play, Clarence Upson Young and Jack Townley; photography, Nick Musuraca; film editor, John Lockert; assistant director, Doran Cox. Cast: James Gleason, Zasu Pitts, Owen Davis, Jr., Louise Latimer, Arthur Aylesworth, Paul Fix, Richard Tucker, Barbara Barondess, James Donlan, Agnes Anderson, Oscar Apfel.

**USUALLY** murder mystery films are spoiled by dumb police officers who are brought onto the stage at intervals to keep us from becoming too interested in the plot. Since Mack Sennett first put dumb policemen on the screen, the impression has prevailed that even in a picture depending for its entertainment value on the manner in which the law unravels a crime problem, there should be one or two hopeless fools in uniform to make the children in an audience laugh and to spoil the picture for those equipped intellectually to be entertained by the various steps taken eventually to put the hand of the law on the shoulder of the perpetrator of the crime. *The Plot Thickens* is better than most murder mystery pictures in the degree in which it avoids running true to form. True, it makes Jim Gleason, the police inspector in charge of the case, dangerously dumb, but keeps him just sane enough to make it reasonable that he and Zasu Pitts, also played for laughs, should solve the mystery and bring the murderer to justice. But I would like to see just one such picture that took crime seriously and did not strive to make us laugh in the face of murder.

**DIRECTION** of Ben Holmes keeps the story progressing smoothly enough to hold the unbroken attention of the audience, so if you can enjoy a little murder now and then in your screen fare, I can recommend *The Plot Thickens* as a picture that will not waste the time you spend in viewing it. It keeps you puzzled, and that is all you reasonably may ask of a picture of the sort. William Siström has given it an adequate production, it is well cast, the screen play is written intelligently, and Nick Musuraca contributes excellent photography.

Murder mysteries are to the book publishing trade what Westerns are to the film industry—a steady, unflinching source of revenue. The authors of the books which sell so well take both their crimes and solutions seriously and make no effort to relieve the tension with "comedy relief." Some day there will arise a film producer who will put into murder pictures the quality which makes the books sell in such large numbers. And he will make a lot of money.

## Entertainment with Irritations

**HIDEAWAY GIRL**, Paramount production and release. Produced by A. M. Botsford; supervised by George Arthur; directed by George Archainbaud; screen play by Joseph Moncure March; based on story by David Garth; assistant director, Hal Walker; film editor, Arthur Schmidt; photographed by Ted Tetzlaff; musical direction, Boris Morros; music and lyrics by Sam Coslow and by Burton Lane and Ralph Freed. Cast: Shirley Ross, Martha Raye, Robert Cummings, Monroe Owsley, Elizabeth Russell, Louis DaPron, Ray Walker, Wilma Francis, Rob Murphy, Edward Brophy, James Eagles, Robert Middlemass, Kenneth Harlan. Running time, 60 minutes.

**A PLEASANT**, nicely mounted and well directed offering which will do much to increase the popularity of two young players destined to accumulate large armies of fans. Shirley Ross and Robert Cummings are suited admirably to play the two sides of a romance. Shirley was helped generously when Fate was serving portions of good luck. Beauty, acting ability and a fine singing voice—surely assets enough to assure a successful screen career. Grooming in such pictures as *Hideaway Girl* and direction such as George Archainbaud gives her, soon will establish her as a prime favorite. The only thing to endanger her progress is the film industry's current craze for denying the public the right to make its own stars. Too much exploitation has done players' careers more harm than too little. Exploitation will make shooting stars, but none who will remain fixed in the cinematic firmament. Players are born with the elements of stardom; publicity departments can not impart the elements to them.

A case in point is Martha Raye, heavily exploited as a headliner in *Hideaway Girl*. In her drunken scene in *Rhythm on the Range*, Martha revealed a flash of comedy genius, just an intimation of something which is susceptible of development. In *Hideaway Girl* she manages to be only an irritating element, shouting songs in an unmusical, harsh voice, working her generous mouth into grotesque shapes and disporting herself generally in a manner inconsistent with the moods of the scenes in which she appears. Long before she is permitted to develop whatever real cinematic talents she has, the public will tire of her. The only scene in her current picture which has any dramatic strength, one in which the mystery of the hideaway girl is cleared up, Martha bursts into with grotesque interpolations not related even remotely to what is going on.

**OF** course, *Hideaway Girl* is only a class B Picture, and apparently it is permissible to smother such pictures in their cradles. This one could have been a thoroughly satisfactory piece of screen entertainment if it had not been mutilated to force Martha Raye on the public at the



sacrifice of screen values. Every time we become interested in the thread of the story our attention is directed to more of her antics which could add considerably to a rollicking musical picture in which we do not expect to recognize logic, but having no place in a story deriving its strength from the logical and undisturbed working out of a dramatic plot. In such a picture extraneous interpolations are irritating to the audience no matter how well done they may be.

Young Cummings has an ingratiating personality and enough talent to take him a long way. Monroe Owsley, whom we have not seen much of late, gives a smoothly finished characterization of a sophisticated crook, and Kenneth Harlan makes his presence felt. A screen play which was forced to make so many detours could not achieve much in the way of consistency, but Joseph Moncure March nevertheless makes it interesting. George Archainbaud's direction is outstanding. The setting of the picture is a smart one and Archainbaud keeps it on a smart level. Particularly impressive is the manner in which he directed the dialogue to make it conversational and convincing.

## Age Does Not Wither

ONE WAY PASSAGE, Warner Bros. Directed by Tay Garnett; based on story by Robert Lord; screen play by Wilson Mizner and Joseph Jackson; asst. director Bob Fellows; photography by Robert Kurlle; art director Anton Grot; film editor Ralph Dawson; gowns by Orry-Kelly. Cast: William Powell, Kay Francis, Frank McHugh, Aline MacMahon, Warren Hymer, Frederick Burton, Douglas Gerard, Herbert Mundin.

**R**ELEASED in August, 1932, when paid admissions to talkies touched bottom, *One Way Passage* did not attract the attention its manifold merits entitled it to. So think Warners Brothers and they are going to send it on a return trip to picture houses. After looking at it again the other day, I applaud the intention. A screen play written by Wilson Mizner and Joseph Jackson, both but pleasant memories now, and direction by Tay Garnett, the picture is as fresh and virile as if it were finished yesterday. It is a gripping drama, a poignant romance between a woman condemned to an early death from illness and a man condemned to hang for murder.

Garnett's direction is masterly. He gives us a film which will hold the close attention of picture patrons of all grades of intellect and varying tastes in screen fare. He seems to have been inspired, and from his inspiration has come one of the best motion pictures it has been my good fortune to see. Made at a time when directors seemed to be intent upon putting more noise than expression in the reading of lines, *One Way Passage* gives us dialogue spoken in natural, conversational tones which heighten the dramatic effect of scenes. Garnett resorts at times to symbolism fraught with readily recognizable meaning, to illuminate little bits and he never slights the camera as his most valuable tool.

**M**ISS Francis and Powell in their careers on the screen never have given us better performances than they contribute to this picture. Each is unaware of the fate awaiting the other, but the bravery of both as they lose

themselves in the happiness of the moment, is registered with feeling which gives the drama its strength. Powell is a prisoner aboard a liner bound from Hong Kong to San Francisco, and Kay Francis an American girl coming home. The locale permits the inherently drab drama to be unfolded in a smart locale and Anton Grot availed himself of the opportunity to mount the picture handsomely.

In the cast is Aline MacMahon. The release of the picture should bring to the attention of producers the folly of their neglect of her. She gives a brilliant performance, just one of the series that used to delight audiences. Poor Frank McHugh! Even then they used him to do his best to ruin pictures. He must have been wished on Garnett. A director displaying such brilliancy, such deep understanding of the dramatic possibilities of his story material, only under compulsion would include so many comedy interpolations. What McHugh does, he does well, but thanks to the strength of the story and the direction given it, the doses of comedy do not prove fatal. Before *One Way Passage* is put out again it should be shorn of its closing sequence, a perplexing and totally unnecessary addition to a story which is made to travel to Agua Caliente after it had ended aboard ship in San Francisco harbor.

## Quints In a Good One

REUNION, Twentieth Century-Fox. Directed by Norman Taurog; screen play by Sam Hellman, Gladys Lehman and Sonya Levien; based on a story by Bruce Gould; photography, Daniel B. Clark, A.S.C.; art direction, Mark-Lee Kirk; set decorations by Thomas Little; assistant director, Ed O'Fearn; film editor, Jack Murray; costumes, Royer; sound, W. D. Flick and Roger Heman; musical direction, Emil Newman. Cast: Jean Hersholt, Rochelle Hudson, Helen Vinson, Slim Summerville, Robert Kent, John Qualen, Dorothy Peterson, Alan Dinehart, J. Edward Bromberg, Sara Haden, Montagu Love, Tom Moore, George Ernest, Esther Ralston, Katherine Alexander, Julius Tannen, Edward McWade, Maude Eburne, George Chandler, Claudia Coleman, Hank Mann, Hattie McDaniel.  
Reviewed by JOHN CHRISTENSEN

**T**O Darryl F. Zanuck, the technical staff, and the cast goes the combined honor of a splendid and entertaining picture. To give each person connected with it individual credit would fill this review with nothing but names. But it is to these individuals in the cast who should receive a great deal of the credit for the picture. The screen play is excellent. It is of the *Grand Hotel* type, which, if told in synopsis form, would not make a great deal of sense to the reader. Ordinarily such a story is jerky and hard to follow on the screen, but due to the splendid work of Sam Hellman, Gladys Lehman, and Sonya Levien, the sequences blend into each other and difficulty in following the story is avoided.

Norman Taurog, the director, has good material, with which to work, and through his direction and the handling of his cast produces notable screen entertainment. Jean Hersholt, as Dr. Luke, is even better in this picture than he was in the last Quintuplet story. His quality of human understanding is superb. Rochelle Hudson and Robert Kent provide the love interest. Miss Hudson is not given a great deal to do, but what little she is given she does very well. Robert Kent, a newcomer, seems a bit stiff as yet, but shows promise of bigger things to

come. He would be a good one to keep an eye on in the future.

Esther Ralston and Tom Moore have been too long off the screen. They are outstanding in their parts and show their years of training. With such players still in Hollywood, there is no need for expensive search for new faces and talent. They are already here. To the rest of the cast, each outstanding in his role down to the smallest bit player, goes the salute of a job well done. There was some doubt as to whether the Quints could be sold to the public the second time. This doubt was dispelled with this picture. A bit older now they are still the drawing power they were before and are even more enjoyable.

There is only one outstanding fault in the picture. This is a ridiculous scene with Montagu Love, as Sir Basil Crawford, trying to get back his gavel from a little boy. It is in very bad taste. A person called upon to preside at a banquet is usually one who will command the attention of his audience. To ask the audience to accept a blustering person who lacks such dignity as to crawl under a table and fight with a small boy, as a principal speaker at a banquet before a gathering from all over the nation, is to insult the picture audience. It is such action as this that causes hard feeling in the foreign countries where the picture is shown. Such a scene was entirely unnecessary to the picture and could have been eliminated easily.

### Box-Office Behavior

By HOWARD HILL

AS we glance over the box-office score-board, we find a few of the better pictures leading the way with the big grosses and most of the rest doing just so-so business. As this is written, *Libeled Lady* and *The Big Broadcast of 1937* are the outstanding attractions. *Motion Picture Daily* reported *Libeled Lady* having a \$21,000 week in Kansas City, which was \$9,500 above the average, and apparently made the going pretty tough for all the other first runs there. In New York this MGM feature was giving the Capitol Theatre the best business it has had in many months and at Boston it was doing "socko" business according to *Variety*. Buffalo and Cleveland were also going strong for *Lady*.

Cities where *The Big Broadcast* was doing top business were New York, Montreal, Buffalo, St. Louis, Seattle, Baltimore and Portland, Oregon. *My Man Godfrey* and *The Great Ziegfeld* continue to pile up big grosses, and *The Gay Desperado* was having satisfactory business. The trio of football pictures released at the height of the football season, *The Big Game*, (Radio), *Pigskin Parade* (Twentieth Century-Fox) and *Rose Bowl* (Paramount) all seemed to be attracting fair attention, but none of them could be considered as doing outstanding business.

The great Warner feature, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, is starting off well in the first openings and apparently is on the way to big business. The same can be said for Sam Goldwyn's *Come and Get it*. *Theodora Goes Wild* opened at the Music Hall in New York with indications that it would be in the big money class.

## New York Spectacle

By F. S.

New York, November 16

ONE of the best shorts I have seen was shown recently at the Capitol Theatre. It is a cinematic essay by Pete Smith on ski-ing, and it truly deserves a place in the literature of motion pictures. It is not only a descriptive essay, but also a visual poem in praise of flight. There are in this picture several vivid examples of the subjective uses of montage. As the jumper takes off, for instance, we follow him down the slide to the very point where his skis leave the boards and he takes to the air. Then suddenly we see a bird soaring about in the air, gliding slowly, easily, gracefully, for a long moment. We return then to the skier, who still glides onward through the sky; again we see the bird, and again the skier still soaring onward and outward; then for a brief moment we see the ecstatic faces of girls watching him below; then again we see the jumper, returning at last to the snow and to the earth in a long rhythmic glide.

Through the manipulation of the camera and the creative art of the director, we have felt, as we never have before, the tremendous thrill of ski jumping; we have, through montage, become the jumper himself, and have known for the first time the wild soaring sensation and the prolonged delicious agony of the jump. It is a pity that film reviewers have been forced by the mediocrity of most shorts to stay in the theatre only long enough to see the feature picture, for in missing Pete Smith's shorts they are missing some of the finest work offered by the cinema of today.

\* \* \*

LOYD PANTAGES begins his Hollywood column of November 5th as follows: "Paul Lukas has signed with a European film company to go to Switzerland, St. Moritz to be exact, to make a movie, which is quite a break, since Christmas at St. Moritz is the gayest place in the world to be." Ah, well, Mr. Pantages, we all have a nostalgia for St. Moritz, which surely is the merriest season of the year.

\* \* \*

THE cinema offers civilization one of the most effective means of anti-war propaganda, through making it possible for people to see, in films taken of actual combat, just how horrible and meaningless war is. The Rialto Theatre in New York is now showing a series of uncensored newsreels recently arrived from Spain. This film, entitled *The Spanish Civil War*, and presented by Adolph Pollack and edited by A. Battiston, is so graphic that I fear it will not have much of a run here, and will probably not reach many other cities. The motion picture industry needs a benevolent, socially-minded ruling body which would insist that each war-glorifying picture shown by an exhibitor be accompanied on the same program by a few documentary shots of actual warfare.

Furthermore, it should be compulsory for every adult in this country, at least, now and then to see such scenes as are shown in this picture. I have in mind one particu-

lar sequence which shows several hundred soldiers who have been driven to the water's edge, and who attempt to escape by boarding two large barges and pushing out to sea. As they struggle, half in and half out of the water, a few hidden machine guns calmly rake the area and kill the whole desperate lot. People who find slaughter houses nauseating should be tied to their seats before such a film as this, and should have it impressed upon them that the sordid and futile death which the telescopic camera brings so close, is immeasurably more horrible than the painless, quick, and unexpected death of cattle. . . . This film, incidentally, is explained by a running commentary, and its effectiveness is somewhat marred by the grammar and the speech of the commentator. In fact, the carnage on the screen is almost equalled by his sympathetic butchery of the English language.

\* \* \*

**I**NASMUCH as I have not seen the film myself, and I think it should be of interest here, I will take the liberty of quoting the *New York Times's* dependable reviewer, Frank S. Nugent, on *Nightingale*, the first all-color picture to be made in Russia. "The Russian color process", he writes, "is more successful than Hollywood's Technicolor in dealing with flesh tones. In general, however, it is all too obvious that the Russian color-film still is in an experimental state. It is sharply defined one minute, blurred the next, and garish and somber by unexpected turns." I trust that this condition will not start a new exodus of American engineers to the U.S.S.R.. Our color processes may approach nearer to perfection than do the Russian, but we are still far away from it, and our color engineers had best stay at home for yet awhile.

\* \* \*

**A**NOTHER quotation which readers of the SPECTATOR should find interesting, comes from Richard Watts Jr.'s review of *Stage Door* in the *Herald Tribune*. Watts was formerly the motion picture reviewer for the same paper, and is now its drama critic, having taken up the reins dropped by Percy Hammond. Of the Ferber-Kaufmann play, which is the most recent attack launched by the legitimate stage against Hollywood, he writes: "The most obvious irony is that the authors of *Stage Door*, after pointing with alarm at the way in which the cinema ruins potential talent, have selected for leading roles Miss Margaret Sullavan, Miss Phyllis Brooks and Onslow Stevens, all three from the films, and that the Hollywood refugees show no signs that their talents have been injured. On the contrary, Miss Sullavan, who has been seen on the stage in these parts before, is now a decidedly more expert actress than she was before she sojourned in Hollywood." Mr. Kaufmann would probably say that Mr. Watts should go back to being a movie critic.

\* \* \*

**A**DDED signs of returning prosperity: The breed of men who sell tickets in the box-offices of our legitimate theatre has once again, as a class, become overbearing and insulting. At the bottom of the depression these men were polite and helpful; now that business is better they have returned to their old habit of sneering

at those who come to buy admissions. Today the average would-be theatre goer again turns sadly away from the box-office, feeling somehow that in asking to buy a ticket he has been guilty of brash impertinence. Prosperity is a great thing for everyone.

\* \* \*

**C**ALIFORNIANS should be pleased to see the advertisement which the French P. L. M. Railway Company has placed in the official program for the Monte Carlo Ballet Russe. It begins thus: "Why not spend your next vacation on the French Riviera, Europe's California?" Real Estate agents and Chambers of Commerce out on the Coast who read this ad will probably wonder how they ever made the mistake of calling California "The Riviera of America", thus comparing their glorious coastline with the parvenu playground on the Mediterranean Sea. They will feel, no doubt, that they have hitched their star to a wagon.

\* \* \*

**C**OMPETITION between the many alley gasoline stations around New York is becoming increasingly severe. One station in Greenwich Village has gone to the extent of offering a package of your favorite cigarettes with every dollar's worth of gasoline purchased. The stations which belong to the major oil companies do not stoop so low, but they vie with one another in service to the motorist. According to a friend of mine, who runs a station for the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, competition is becoming so acute that the station attend-

DOGS

H. M. ROBERTSON  
At Seventy - Thirty  
On the Boulevard

ants may soon be required not only to wipe off windshields, check tires, batteries, and so forth, but also may have to give a quick brushing to the shoes, clothing and hair of their customers while the gas is being run into the tank, and may perhaps even be obliged to clean up their hats and adjust their ties. My friend stated flatly that if this comes to pass he will hand in his resignation.

\* \* \*

**WHAT** happened to a runaway horse on Eighth Avenue the other day may interest psychologists and people who have read about the acquired reflex. The animal shied at a veering taxicab (as who would not), hurled the teamster out of the wagon, and went plunging down the avenue, pursued by worried policemen on motorcycles and cheering children on foot. The horse galloped about five blocks in this fashion when suddenly and without warning he pulled up short—much to the delight of the police and the chagrin of the children. The traffic lights, it appears, had gone from green to red.

\* \* \*

**SURELY** one of the reasons why people stay away from some pictures must be the sort of advance advertising given to them. As an example of the kind of notice which invariably makes me prefer the comfort of a good chair and a good book, I offer the following lines, encountered in the lobby of the Paramount Theatre shortly before the opening there of *Valiant Is The Word For Carrie*: "‘Bad woman’ they called her, and she was. But when a couple of homeless kids trusted her and thought she was good. . . . Carrie came through!" . . . . And I stayed home.

## Cinematic Pulse

By PAUL JACOBS

**ALTHOUGH** Hollywood has been plagued to the point of hysteria by self-appointed analysts, unarguably, there is a desperate need of psychology scientifically applied to problems of the human equation.

Understanding of an audience's reactions in terms of its association of ideas would immediately determine the approach to many sequences. There is a specific mental machinery so fundamental to the complex function of the reflexes, that it finds a highly developed component in the cerebellum of animals. For example, it has been found that if, repeatedly, a dog is fed immediately after the ringing of a bell, his mouth will water at any time the bell is rung. He has associated the sound of the bell with food. This, strictly, is not a mental, but a physiological reaction.

Carried further, the well known frantic dash of hungry ranch hands at the clangor of the cookie's triangle, is its mental or cerebral component; in this case a definite mental association is formed. In the same way, an audience carries with it, to the theatre, a vast host of unconscious cinematic associations.

Thus, an audience immediately associates Chaplin with comedy; Fairbanks (senior) with swift action, etc. Consequently, we generally know what type of portrayal to expect. But here is the significant point: Audience in-

terest is built largely on sustained curiosity. Therefore, any upset of the audience's pre-conceived ideas comes as a refreshing stimulant to curiosity.

\* \*

**BECAUSE** of this fundamental truth, producers obviously are overlooking many splendid opportunities for pungent entertainment. Here is a case in point: In *M'liss*, Douglas Dumbrille portrays Brete Harte's staunch and faithful gambler. Dumbrille has made quite a name for himself as a heavy. Constantly, during *M'liss*, a woman behind me remarked to her friend, "He seems to be all right, but I bet he's up to somethin'." She, along with the rest of us, had associated Dumbrille with villainy; his repeatedly villainous roles has formed in the audience-mind an "association of ideas." Thus, throughout, this woman unconsciously injected the sparkling effluvia of uncertainty, which heightened her enjoyment and kept her interest at a brittle pitch.

And there is another important bit of psychology: We all enjoy seeing someone vindicate himself of dishonor; we thrill to the realization that man has redeemed his good standing. Don't laugh when I apply this to our screen heavies. There is a very real tendency to carry the association of film character over to real life. We grow distrustful of the Charles Laughtons and the Basil Rathbones. And we thoroughly enjoy finding them, in other rolls, to be fine, honorable, courageous men. It adds an immeasurable pleasure to any picture.

\* \*

**CARRIED** still further, the audience's associations of ideas may be made to serve another purpose. A series of gentlemanly roles will gradually over-shadow any screen villain's standing as a heavy, until, finally, the audience takes him to its heart as a very likeable fellow. Once this a new association is formed, the erstwhile villain can constantly be switched from antagonist to protagonist; a brute in one film and a gentleman in another. And in each case, the priceless ingredient of audience uncertainty will lend its powerful dramatic support to the forwarding movement. The audience will never be duly certain of his character before the story gives its proof.

But that is not all. Producers stupidly have allowed audience association to rob us of many brilliant portrayals. Zasu Pitts' magnificent mother in *All Quiet on the Western Front* was ripped out and replaced by a vastly inferior bit of acting, because some nit-wit laughed. It wasn't the fault of that weak-minded individual; it was the fault of producers who, through the years, unrealizingly implanted the association of Zasu Pitts with comedy. Consequently, the splendid talent of Miss Pitts and others must forever waste itself on moronic twaddle; the audience, is cheated of genius because some of film's big brains have never learned to think.

\* \* \*

**MANY** of our films lose their dramatic integrity by being photographically too beautiful. I have often noticed shots whose isolated panoramic perfection destroys the unity of relationship between the preceding and following frames. *No one element of an art may impose itself over another.* When this is understood, we will find even the stars used as plastic material in the building of unity; elements with other elements, significant only as light, mood or rhythm are significant—a unit in a pattern.

## Readers Write

**O**PINIONS of its readers on all matters concerning the screen are sought by the SPECTATOR. This department belongs to those who wish to contribute to it, and particularly welcome are letters taking issue with opinions expressed by the Editor. If contributors desire to remain anonymous, it is all right with us. The thoughts presented, not the names signed to them, determine the availability of letters for publication.

### Jimmy Savo as Hamlet

I agree with you that Jimmy Savo is the type of actor that Hollywood could use to its advantage, his particular style belonging more on the screen than on the stage. The trouble is that Hollywood is not looking for screen actors. It is stage-struck—as you put it, it photographs stage technique and thinks it is making motion pictures. If Savo were brought out here his producer no doubt would cast him as Hamlet, on the theory that a man's ability to read lines is the measure of his fitness for a screen career.—*G. B. H., Hollywood.*

### College Student's Plea

May I comment on the stand you have been taking in your last few issues of the SPECTATOR? Your point is well taken in so far as dialogue is concerned in pictures. Too many times a scene has been ruined by the characters speaking in a tone of voice not in keeping with the particular scene. May I join you in your compliment to Clarence Brown for the scene in the *Gorgeous Hussy* when Joan Crawford and Robert Taylor whisper all the dialogue? It was the natural way for the characters to talk and it added greatly in the enjoyment of the picture. Let's hope that more directors will follow this example and more screen writers will write dialogue in keeping with the scene. I am a college student studying the screen.—*Clark Johnson, New York City.*

### Anna Flatters the Editor

You may recall a letter from me in which I told you that I sometimes vary my use of the SPECTATOR by sending members of my Motion Picture Appreciation Class to see a picture and having them write criticisms of it before I read them the SPECTATOR criticism. I did this with *The General Died at Dawn*. I am enclosing the criticism of one of my pupils, Anna Brockway, 17. She did not read your criticism before writing her own, but I am afraid you will think she did, for she has mentioned every point you did. Other pupils received good marks for their reviews but Anna was the only one who scored 100. Marks are graded according to the degree in which the pupils agree with the SPECTATOR reviews.—*John Amherst, Chicago.*

*To Anna Brockway, for flattering the SPECTATOR's Editor by demonstrating that he is as quick as she is in spotting the good and bad points of a motion picture, will go a year's complimentary subscription to the SPECTATOR if she will send us her home address and the name of her school. Mr. Amherst failed to mention either.*

### His Interesting Point of View

The enclosed check for a renewal of my SPECTATOR subscription for another year demonstrates the general satisfaction your paper gives me, but I do not approve of all the reforms in pictures you are trying to bring about. For instance, loud dialogue. I am a little hard of hearing, so I say, let 'em howl!—*R. T. Stern, New Orleans.*

### Pennsylvania Wants Westerns

Your contention that the people like to have action in their screen entertainment makes a hit with me. Here in this coal-mining country most of us are fed up with pictures showing over-sized living rooms filled with actors talking their heads off. Why can't Hollywood understand that most of us have never been west of Pittsburg and that there is a great fascination about the wild West and what we think goes on out there?

As a matter of fact, there is still a good number of people in this part of the country who think the Indians still go on the warpath and the cowboys ride into town and shoot up the bar room and they like their picture entertainment to take them to the ringside and such activities. Keep your voice raised for bigger and better Westerns.—*Thomas Kennedy, Wilkesbarre, Pennsylvania.*

### More Federal Relief Available

In your last issue of the SPECTATOR you mention the Federal Theatre Project and the splendid performances of the members of the cast. All over the country these Federal Theatre Projects are functioning. Likewise the Little Theatres are producing well directed and well acted plays. Yet it seems, from the publicity in the newspapers, that studio heads are offering great sums for new faces and new personalities. In all probability there are enough well trained and experienced actors and actresses appearing in such plays to fill the ranks of contract players as well as the ranks of the stars. The actual number of new faces and personalities appearing on the screen is slight. Can it be that the studio heads are afraid to develop this talent, or is it that the desire for new talent is not as important as the studio heads claim?—*Francis S. Haley, Los Angeles.*

### One Point to Stress

Your SPECTATOR is, of course, the most important text book we use in our Motion Picture Appreciation course. It covers intelligently every angle of the subject, but I would like to know if in your opinion there is not one point which we should stress. Young minds, approaching the subject for the first time, are easier to interest in something specific than in the entire study. I am sure other teachers feel the same way, so I would suggest that you reply to this note in the SPECTATOR, but please do not use my name.—*M. B. D., Pittsburg, Pa.*

*Study direction. Encourage students to become familiar with the names of directors. In Hollywood the most important thing about a picture is its director. When students become familiar*

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WELFORD BEATON  
in  
THE SPECTATOR

with the technique of various directors, they can judge in advance of seeing a picture the degree of entertainment they will derive from it. Players scarcely ever are responsible for poor pictures, and only seldom can they be blamed on poor stories. Expert direction can make almost any story entertaining. Note the degree in which directors establish complete naturalness, have their players talk like ordinary people, not actors; note the grouping of characters, the composition of scenes, the ease with which entrances and exits are made. Second in importance are the film editors, who are entrusted with the final fabrication of the physical element of the production—the film—into a smoothly flowing whole, one which will hold the uninterrupted attention of the viewer.

### Beginning to Bear Fruit

I see in a late issue of your interesting magazine the comment on a picture entitled *Rose Bowl*. In your comment you suggest that the director has lost sight of the fact that he is making a motion picture football story, and also, that the characters act like human beings. Rather I would say that the ideals and principles of the art of the motion picture, for which you have been striving, are at last beginning to bear fruit, however small, and at least one director has produced a motion picture which proves your contentions, namely, that a motion picture may have a story that is natural and characters who are fine and well bred young people, and still be excellent entertainment.—*P. A. Miller, New York.*

### Plea for Real Talent

In your paper you often call the attention of the producers to the fact that they do not have to develop new faces and personalities, but should build up the talent they already have. May I call your attention to the fact that there are a number of talented people who are playing very minor parts in pictures who have had years of experience on both the stage and screen. They appear briefly in a picture and do a splendid bit of work and then disappear until some director suddenly remembers them. I shall recall a few of them to mind. There is Thomas Jackson, who can give a real performance anytime and in almost any part, but because there are not enough detective parts he appears but seldom. E. E. Clive is another. He has never been given a part that is up to his ability. Jack Mulhall is still appearing in very minor parts. His smile is just as winning as it ever was, and he still has the same ability he had before, but all he does is appear for a few moments in a picture. These are but three who happen to come to my mind at the present, but there are others like them who are only too able. Why aren't such players given a real chance and developed into real box-office stars?—*Robert R. Nelson, Hollywood.*

## WHAT EDUCATORS SAY ABOUT THE SPECTATOR

FROM all over the United States the SPECTATOR is receiving letters telling it that high schools and institutions of higher learning are giving serious study to motion pictures. That the SPECTATOR has been privileged to play an important part in these studies is highly gratifying. The following quotations indicate the value of this publication to educators:

I am circulating the Hollywood SPECTATOR through all the members of my department. Their reactions are highly favorable to your interesting and, I believe, discriminating and authentic critique of the movie industry. I quite sympathize with your plea for something in the way of a return to the old silent art which left somewhat more to our imagination and gave us the work of some outstanding artists who are now altogether too seldom seen.—*Arthur J. Todd, College of Liberal Arts, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.*

I prefer your reviews to all the rest put together. Last week I used nearly a whole period of my Movie Appreciation class to laud Mr. Beaton's reviews, and to compare their worth and dependability with those found in other papers and magazines. The pupils have the privilege of taking the magazine to read during their study periods. We depend upon it largely for our decisions about what picture to see next, for the reviews usually precede the Rochester showings by just about a week.—*Mrs. Margaret Holley Carson, Madison High School, Rochester, N. Y.*

The students look forward to each issue of the SPECTATOR and nearly stand in line for the current number. My only problem is thievery. And as I am particularly interested in binding together each volume, a missing issue causes a great deal of grief. If things continue, it will be necessary for me to nail the SPECTATOR to the library table. That's how popular your magazine is with our students.—*Harold M. Turney, Chairman, Department of Drama, Los Angeles Junior High School, Los Angeles, California.*

We are very glad here in Santa Barbara High School to have the SPECTATOR as my seniors find it a welcome change from the ordinary run of 'fan' and 'blah-blah' movie magazines. Mr. Beaton's sincerity of purpose is a real beacon to which they are glad to turn.—*Miss E. Louise Noyes, Santa Barbara High School, Santa Barbara, California.*

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RICHARD BOLESŁAWSKI

And to Welford Beaton for his comment:

“Joseph Schildkraut is the bright spot in the cast. His performance is excellent.”



*Hollywood*

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CENTS

**S P E C T A T O R**

Eleventh Year

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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Volume II

DECEMBER 19, 1936

No. 19

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*Growing Menace of The Vicious  
Agency Racket*

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MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS

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ALL COMMENT \* \* \* HOLLYWOOD'S OLDEST FILM PUBLICATION \* \* \* NO GOSSIP

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From the

# Editor's Easy Chair



**UNQUESTIONABLY** a condition which needs remedying is that which has become a vicious agency racket. Business managers are a necessity to creative artists who receive the enormous salaries Hollywood pays. Arranging contracts is a job in itself which few artists are capable of handling. All managers, however, are not content to work within legitimate limits. Perhaps I can make my meaning clear by reciting the details of one case among the many similar ones with which I am familiar.

**WHEN** Warner Brothers could not secure Robert Donat for the name part in *Captain Blood*, Michael Curtiz, who was to direct it, thought of a young fellow on the studio payroll who had played a bit in the last Curtiz picture. There was something in the way he handled the bit that gave Mike the idea he had something that perhaps could be developed. Jack Warner was surprised when told by the director that Errol Flynn should be tested for the leading part in what was to be a million-dollar production. No one ever had heard of Flynn, but Jack, Hollywood's most daring producer, will try anything once. The young Irishman was sent for, put through a series of tests, and given the part. Then it was up to the studio to raise him to star status as nearly as it could be done by publicity in advance of his screen appearance. That took money. By the time *Captain Blood*, with Errol Flynn as its star, reached the theatres, Warner Brothers had spent one and a half million dollars on it—had gambled that much money on Flynn's making good, on giving him an opportunity to establish himself as an important screen personality. No one, least of all Flynn himself, seemed to give thought to the fact that while all this was going on the Irishman was getting only the \$125 a week his contract called for.

**BUT** Jack Warner thought of it when the first showings of the picture proved it to be a success. He sent for Flynn and told him that thereafter his salary would be one thousand dollars per week. Errol nearly died right there, and it was not until next day that he realized he had a new contract which provided that his salary would take seasonable higher leaps into the grotesque sums screen salaries assume. He was a most contented young man, and when he scored another triumph in *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, his cup of contentment and happiness was filled to the brim. Full of gratitude to Warner

Brothers for taking such large chances on him, he went into another picture, *Another Dawn*, directed by William Dieterle.

**ENTER** the villain. Myron Selznick sought out Flynn and told him he was a fool for working for one thousand dollars a week—that he was worth three thousand, and that he, Selznick, could get it for him. First, Flynn would have to sign an exclusive contract with Selznick to manage him, the contract providing for payment to Selznick of ten per cent of the salary if he succeeded in breaking the existing contract with the studio and getting another with an advance in salary. It all sounded alluring to the young actor and he signed. One morning Dieterle phoned from the *Another Dawn* set to Jack Warner in his office and said shooting was being held up because Flynn's manager refused to let him go to work until he got a new contract. On being told that Selznick was on the set, Jack asked to speak to him. The studio boss asked the manager if he was aware how much it was costing the studio every hour production was halted. Selznick replied that he didn't care a damn, that Flynn would not go to work until he was assured of a new contract calling for a salary of three thousand dollars a week.

**WHAT** could Warner do? It would cost a stupendous sum to take Flynn out of the picture, substitute someone else and shoot over again everything that had been done. Also it cost a lot every hour he thought it over. Flynn was given a new contract, the salary matter being compromised at twenty-five hundred a week, out of which, of course, Selznick gets two hundred and fifty dollars, and Flynn gets the rest, plus whatever satisfaction it gives him to reflect that his manager put the screws on the firm which spent a million and a half in turning the world's spotlight on him. If his hide is thick enough, he can solace himself with the reflection that what his manager did is merely part of the routine of the agency racket—turning perfectly satisfied players, writers, directors into discontented employes who feel they are worth far more than they are getting. My personal opinion is that it is a dirty way to make money, morally about on a par with the sort of blackmail which comes within the embrace of the criminal code.

**T**OO bad I can't find something to fill out this two-line, bottom-of-column space.

**W**HAT is the matter with the movies? The New York *Times* asked Samuel Goldwyn for a reply to the question. If any producer knows, Sam would be the one. With twenty-six years of experience behind him and to his credit a greater number of successful pictures than any other individual producer can boast, he should be qualified to speak with authority on any screen topic. But the SPECTATOR has said at least once for each of its eleven years that there is not one producer in the business who has the remotest idea what a motion picture is. It behooves us, therefore, to analyze Sam's reply to determine whether his cinematic views are sound or if our conception of producer astuteness is just sound and fury, signifying nothing.

**N**O ONE can quarrel with nine-tenths of what Sam has to say. His opinions on the social aspects of the motion picture medium are enlightened and clearly expressed. But there is one paragraph I would like to discuss: "The sincere producer has the problem of not making all his films for the mind of a child. Occasionally a Shirley Temple or a Jackie Coogan may appear whose pictures appeal to adults and children alike. But, as a rule, the producer has the difficult task of trying to tell a human true story that will be acceptable as entertainment for an 11-year-old girl, a 40-year-old matron, a 60-year-old grandmother. New York audiences of sophistication, farmers on Saturday night in an Iowa town, an audience in London and a small theatre clientele in British South Africa—no wonder we cannot completely satisfy each of these many audiences!"

**W**HEN the screen was compelled by the mechanical limitations of its medium to observe its laws as an individual art, it experienced no difficulty in pleasing each of the widely diversified and geographically widespread audiences Sam enumerates. The silent picture had universal appeal; it appealed alike to the old and the young, the native and the foreigner. Its language was visual; all people with sight could understand it, all grades of intelligence could derive entertainment from it. Being visual, its appeal was direct to the emotions, and each person in the audience interpreted it in terms of his emotions and imagination. It was entertainment for the whole family, and the only correct answer to the question the *Times* put to the Hollywood producer is that it no longer is universal entertainment, that producers abandoned the business they were in prior to the advent of the sound device and embarked on another with totally different fundamentals. They made pictures aural instead of visual, changed their appeal from emotional to intellectual and dismissed the imagination as a factor in their enjoyment. That, as I see it, is the whole answer to the question of what is wrong with the movies. Mr. Goldwyn's failure even to hint it tends to support the SPECTATOR's contention that producers do not know what a motion picture is.

**L**ET me make clear what part the imagination played in the universal popularity of silent pictures. The whole

family patronized them. Father saw in them what his matured imagination ascribed to them; mother's imagination functioned from the woman's angle, and Willie and Bessie interpreted them in terms of their individual imaginative powers. The language used in a quarrel scene shown without spoken titles was what each viewer imagined the players were saying, thus constituting the only perfect dialogue the screen ever had or ever could have. An important element also was the fact that the voices of the various players sounded to the imaginations exactly as each conceived the tones to be, and all diction necessarily was perfect. The educated American and Briton heard perfect English, the cockney heard it with outraged h's. And so it went with all languages and all countries, with those who were educated and those who lacked education. And it was the same with the interpretation of scenes. Willie did not see in a given scene exactly what Father saw in it, but each saw it in conformity with his conception of the scene; therefore it fitted completely into the pattern of the story—not the story the screen was telling, but the story each imagination was weaving with the material the screen was supplying as inspiration for imagination's functioning.

**O**NE need only look at a talkie to see how completely the screen was revolutionized by the microphone. No longer can we use it to tell ourselves the stories it suggests. The screen today absolutely ignores its audience, spurns its cooperation, and arbitrarily thrusts on it its own conception of what constitutes film entertainment. Where yesterday it had but one audience which made practically every picture earn profits, today it has a divided audience, one of many parts, each with its own taste in film fare, and only the occasional picture that appeals to one of the parts, manages to make money. The microphone gave producers an opportunity to achieve greater glories by its legitimate use in place of the cumbersome printed titles and the intelligent addition of music at the picture's source of origin. Instead, it has been used so unintelligently that only the strength inherent in the screen as a medium of entertainment has enabled it to stand up under the terrific punishment accorded it. "No wonder we can't supply each of these many audiences," wails Mr. Goldwyn. If Hollywood made motion pictures there would be but one audience to supply. And that is what is the matter with the movies.

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**A**LL OVER THE PLACE: If I were a producer of pictures I never would show the interior of a home without a dog or two as part of the household. . . . On a Hollywood Boulevard marquee: Kay Francis Give Me Your Heart. Surely Delmar Daves would not be that ostentatious about it. . . . A prediction: The producer who eventually will come nearest filling the place left vacant by the late Irving Thalberg is Joseph Pasternak, now producing for Universal. . . . Persuaded one of my daughters to put on dark glasses, pull her furs up over her face and make a dash out of a theatre after a preview. Great fun! A whole flock of autograph hunters chased us all the way to our car. Faded away sheepishly when she took off her glasses, lowered her furs and smiled at them.

... *Lovers of Life*, book of outstanding poems by the late Edwards Davis, motion picture actor, would make an appropriate Christmas present. For sale by his widow, P. O. Box 1106, Hollywood... Producers tell me a great deal of dialogue is necessary when pictures are made from books and plays. In the silent days good screen versions were made without any trouble. Why not now? . . . . Brought Una Merkel and Madge Evans to time by reminding them in the last SPECTATOR of the threesome luncheon they promised me. As soon as Una finishes her present picture chore I am to get an engraved invitation notifying me of time and place. Powerful weapon, publicity. . . . It is altogether too long since I saw Claudette Colbert in person or on the screen. . . . Frederick Stone, SPECTATOR'S "New York Spectacle" man, now in Hollywood, accompanying me on his first visits to studios. Brilliant writer. His impressions of Hollywood will make good reading in a subsequent issue. . . . Some years ago confessed in these pages that I was in love with Mary Brian, and now every time I encounter the minx she asks me what I am going to do about it. . . . And next week Mrs. Spectator and I celebrate our twenty-eighth wedding anniversary. . . . Scene in *Lloyds of London* brought back memories of my last evening in the great city. I sat in the well-worn seat Samuel Johnson occupied in his visits to the Cheshire Cheese, dined on beefsteak and kidney pie and wrote in the visitors' book of many famous names: "Come I again to sit where wits did sit, To feel the smooth unease of Johnson's seat Before I sail away o'er troubles seas To lands that wot not of the Cheshire Cheese."

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**P**ART of a radio broadcast ballyhooing *Garden of Allah*, was a statement by Dave Selznick that it has been established that color has as much right to a place on the screen as dialogue has. Right! Neither has any right. The only difference is that we must use some dialogue to hurry the stories along, while there is no reason whatever for the use of color.

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**O**NE of the SPECTATOR'S recent subscribers asks me a question I find it necessary to answer at least once a year. He notes that I charge Hollywood with lack of knowledge of what a motion picture is, and yet in my reviews praise some pictures in highest terms; the question I am called upon to answer at regular intervals: How come? Because a picture does not obey the laws of screen art does not mean it is not good entertainment; and because such pictures are the only ones Hollywood is making, I have to review them or review nothing. I like talkies. Any evening I do not see one I feel cheated. If the film industry considered only my inclinations, it would go ahead as it is going now. I can see six or seven talkies per week because it is my business to see them. They engage my mind as a lawyer's briefs engage his. But the lawyer goes to a film theatre in search of mental relaxation, to get away from his business, to be entertained by his emotions, not by his mind. The true motion picture, visual entertainment with direct appeal to his emotions and not to his intellect, provided the complete mental rest which sent him back to his briefs with renewed vigor. It was the rest they provided that was the reason for the

## HOLIDAY NUMBER NEXT

The next issue of the Spectator to reach you will be the Holiday Number. Our campaign to secure advertising for it was designed to give prospective purchasers the least possible bother, the telephone being the only contact with those solicited. Many promised we would hear from them later; many others we were unable to reach. To all of them we express the hope that we will be encouraged by their patronage to go forward with our plans for a bigger and better Spectator during the coming year. A telephone request — GLadstone 5213 — will bring full information.

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regularity of attendance at silent pictures, which established the picture-going habit that made practically all silent pictures box-office successes.

**T**HE talkie's appeal is intellectual. Seeing it is mental exercise. It does not provide the rest the lawyer seeks. Its nature prompts him to become selective, to see only the best, to spurn the others. In the silent days he cared little what he saw. If a picture failed to hold his interest, he could think of something else. At least, for his money he got peace and quiet, pictures to look at, and soothing music. He saw in the fleeting scenes what his imagination suggested, hence an indifferent silent picture failed to irritate him. To follow a talkie he must listen to dialogue, keep his attention on it, digest it mentally. He enjoys a good one, is irritated by a poor one because it leaves nothing for his imagination to fashion for his pleasure. The financial significance of it to the film industry is that our lawyer does not see as many pictures now as he saw when they were silent. And that is why I keep harping on the wisdom it would be on the part of the industry to recover the element in its screen entertainment that was responsible for the lawyer's more frequent attendance in the silent days, to go back to the business of making motion pictures containing a minimum of audible dialogue and a maximum of visual emotional appeal. It is a simple thing, but producers are mentally more simple still. They cannot see the wisdom of it. Instead of using the microphone only in spots to expedite the telling of their stories, they use it as a machine gun to shoot constant streams of words at us. I don't mind it, but it is not good business.

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**P**RODUCERS will watch with interest the box-office fate of *One Way Passage*, Warner Brothers' picture first released four years ago and now being offered to the public again. Owing to brilliant direction by Tay Garnett and fine performances by William Powell and Kay Francis, it is one of the best pictures of recent years. If in its resurrection it proves a success, it no doubt will encourage the re-issue of other noteworthy productions.

# Some Late Previews

## Outstanding Achievement

**CAMILLE**, Metro production and release. David Lewis, associate producer. Stars Greta Garbo and Robert Taylor. Features Lionel Barrymore, Elizabeth Allan, Jessie Ralph, Lenore Ulric, Henry Daniell, Laura Hope Crews. Directed by George Cukor; screen play by Zoe Akins, Frances Marion and James Hilton; from play and novel by Alexander Dumas (Fils); musical score by Herbert Stothart; dances staged by Val Raset; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Fred-eric Hope and Edwin B. Willis; gowns by Adrian; photographed by William Daniels and Karl Freund; film editor, Margaret Booth. Supporting cast: Rex O'Malley, Russell Hardie, E. E. Clive, Douglas Walton, Marian Ballou, Joan Brodel, June Wilkins, Fritz Leiber, Jr., Elsie Esmonds. Running time, 115 minutes.

**F**OR one thing, we have Garbo's finest performance. Then there is a refreshingly young, talented and handsome Armand in the person of Robert Taylor. We have an investiture that never has been surpassed for artistic conception and sympathetic execution, a brilliantly written screen play based on the Dumas classic, a cast of outstanding merit dressed in superb creations, and brilliant direction which not only reveals the soul of the story, but which composes beautiful pictures from the material at hand for the camera to bring to us as a series of gorgeous creations in shades from white to black. We have had quite a number of outstanding productions this season, but none which outranks *Camille* for visual beauty and expert story-telling. It had progressed so far under his guidance that we may accept it as another tribute to the genius of the late Irving Thalberg, something to crowd in among the memories of the other great things he did while with us.

*Camille* has served opera, the stage, and previously the screen, but never before was presented so imposingly as Metro offers it to us now. Garbo's poor health during its making gives her a spiritual, delicate quality which admirably matches the mood of her role. She is captivating in her lighter scenes and appealingly tender in the romantic ones she shares with Taylor. And Taylor adds to his stature as a motion picture actor, bringing a refreshing quality to his Armand, an ingenuousness which gets its strength from its lack of suggestion of stage experience.

**T**HE even excellence of the performances is a tribute to the superlative quality of George Cukor's direction. He makes his people human by the simple expedient of having them talk like human beings addressing one another and making no effort to reach an audience. Jessie Ralph, Lenore Ulric, Lionel Barrymore, Laura Hope Crews and Henry Daniell have the most important roles and each gives an impressive performance. The emotional values of the story material are admirably developed by Cukor and sustained throughout with an evenness which gripped the friendly audience invited to the preview, but which presented no dramatic climaxes to stir it into applauding. The very absence of physical manifestations of its appreciation was indicative of the audience's complete absorption in the drama.

The visual beauty of the production is compelling. Cedric Gibbons and his talented associates have accom-

plished great things before, but I can recall no other picture which surpassed *Camille* in production so completely in sympathy with the mood of story. William Daniels and Karl Freund, master craftsmen both, provided gorgeous photography, being particularly effective in bringing out the beauty of the gowns designed by Adrian and the delicacy of the materials used in their creation. Cukor's eye for composition gave the cameramen opportunities to bring to the screen a series of arresting scenes rich in pictorial value and right nobly did they realize them. Douglas Shearer's contribution to *Camille* is a big one. This young sound genius has completely mastered the microphone until it brings to our ears even the subdued sighs of *Camille* in her love scenes with Armand.

## Is Quite Delightful

**THREE SMART GIRLS**, Universal production and release. Joseph Pasternak, associate producer; directed by Henry Koster; original story and screen play by Adele Comandini; photographed by Joseph Valentine; special effects, John P. Fulton; film editor, Ted Kent; music by Bronislaw Kaper and W. Jurmann; lyrics by Gus Kahn; musical director, Charles Previn; art supervision and gowns, John Harkrider; associate, Jack Otterson. Cast: Binnie Barnes, Charles Winninger, Alice Brady, Ray Milland, Deanna Durbin, Nan Grey, Barbara Read, Mischa Auer, Ernest Cossart, Lucille Watson, John King, Nella Walker, Hobart Cavanaugh. Running time, 90 minutes.

**O**FTEN I have expressed the opinion in SPECTATOR columns that the screen is not an acting art, that it will get farther by casting personalities which match the parts than it will by casting stage-trained actors who must adjust their personalities to the parts they play. Hollywood, with ten times more talent available than it possibly can keep occupied, always moans of a talent shortage, and then along comes a picture like *Three Smart Girls* to prove that trained talent is not essential to it. The three girls are youngsters who have not had a great deal of experience even in the mere state of being alive, but Helen Hayes, Katharine Cornell and Greta Garbo bunched in one picture could not present a trio of performances more convincing than those of Deanna Durbin, Nan Grey and Barbara Read.

Of course, Deanna may not enter a room or leave it quite in the same manner as Helen was taught to do it, but in the picture Deanna is Penny Craig, and she does everything exactly as Penny Craig would do it, thereby making us forget we are looking at an actress pretending she is someone else. The cleverly constructed and delightfully human story by Adele Comandini gave each of our three girls a part to match her personality, the rest of the cast was chosen wisely, the direction of Henry Koster richly develops all the values latent in his material, Universal has given the picture a handsome mounting, and it all adds up to make *Three Smart Girls* one of the season's most meritorious offerings. An outstanding feature is the charming voice of Deanna Durbin and her extraordinary skill in using it, a gift matched for charm by her engaging personality. She is ingenuous, unspoiled, and no seasoned actress has her emotions under better command.

The story supports the wisdom of another SPECTATOR conviction—that the film industry would be better off if

it would encourage the writing of original stories directly for the screen. I understand Miss Comandini has been knocking on story department doors for some years without receiving an invitation to come in. Charlie Rogers finally heard her knock and was rewarded with a fine piece of screen writing that will appeal strongly to all people who are parents or children, rather an extensive audience for the industry to cater to. Because Hollywood has exploited names at the expense of pictures as a whole, this one will not attract the attention its merits deserve, but if Rogers gives us more like it, the Universal trademark eventually will develop box-office value on its own account.

Henry Koster and Joseph Pasternak constitute a director-producer team which made an impression in Europe, not only by virtue of the entertainment qualities of its pictures, but also by its discovery and development of young screen personalities. Both men were brought here by Carl Laemmle and *Three Smart Girls* is their first American production. They are young fellows from whom we may expect some notable pictures. Koster's direction is smooth, intelligent and seemingly effortless. He does not strive for effects, rather treating his story material as something simple which must be told in terms of the greatest simplicity. He handles his characters sympathetically, the result being a series of expert and nicely blended performances. The settings provided by John Harkrider and Jack Otterson, and the fine photography of Joseph Valentine lend pictorial impressiveness to the production.

## It Will Dig Gold, All Right

**GOLD DIGGERS OF 1937**, Warner Bros. production. Hal B. Wallis, executive producer; Earl Baldwin, associate producer; directed by Lloyd Bacon; screen play by Warren Duff; based on the play, *SWEET MYSTERY OF LIFE*, by Richard Maibaum, Mike Wallace and George Haight; production numbers staged and directed by Busby Berkeley; photography by Arthur Edeson; edited by Tommy Richards; gowns by Orry-Kelly; songs by Harry Warren, Al Dubin, E. Y. Harburg and Harold Arlen; assistant director, Dick Maybery. Cast: Dick Powell, Joan Blondell, Glenda Farrell, Victor Moore, Rosalind Marquis, Irene Ware, William Davidson, Lee Dixon, Osgood Perkins, Charles D. Brown, Susan Fleming, Charles Halton, Olin Howland, Paul Irving, Harry C. Bradley and Joseph Crehan. Running time, 95 minutes.

**UNQUESTIONABLY** the best of the latest crop of musical-spectacle productions, breezily entertaining and visually impressive. More than usually is the case with pictures of the sort, it has a story which binds the whole thing together and picks up logically each of the song and dance interpolations with which it is sprinkled generously. And Warren Duff's screen play, in turn, is sprinkled generously with choice bits of wit. "I like fat men," says one of the gold diggers. "You can outrun them." The gold diggers, too, are a remarkably beautiful lot who go through their capers with zestful enthusiasm which keeps things humming along at a lively rate. The spirit of youth which pervades it is one of the attractive features of the production. For that and for the smooth manner in which the story progresses, the direction of Lloyd Bacon is responsible. He has handled his job expertly.

The story has to do largely with, of all things, the sale of life insurance. Of course it winds up with the usual elaborate stage production—all such pictures wind up that way—but it develops a greater audience interest in the show than any other one succeeded in doing. A queer thing about it is that the story justifies the title. The gold diggers dig gold, but they do it for an unselfish purpose. Good old J. J., played to the hilt by that master comedian, Victor Moore, needs the show to save his financial life, and right nobly do the girls go out and dig up the gold it takes to produce it. So capably has the screen play been written and directed, the audience is rooting for the girls to make good.

**WARNER BROTHERS** give us just enough of it, refraining from overloading it with special numbers until there is too much for us to see and to listen to. Imposingly mounted all the way through, it reaches its peak of visual attractiveness in the closing sequence which seldom has been equalled on the screen for sheer beauty and rhythmic movement. It was staged and directed by Busby Berkeley and is the finest thing he has given us. Arthur Edeson, cameraman, performs tricks in the sequence, producing effects in loveliness that no other art or medium of entertainment can approach even remotely. Even if what precedes it would fail to interest you, *Gold Diggers* is worth sitting through just to catch the ending.

But if such pictures are on the bill of screen fare you find palatable, this one will prove a dainty dish. Harry Warren and Harold Arlen have provided tuneful melodies for the lyrics of Al Dubin and E. Y. Harburg; and Dick Powell, supported by a surprising number of vocalists among the members of the cast, does full justice to the words and music. Dick, whose voice I always like, both sings and acts as if he were enjoying himself hugely, which is one sure way of pleasing an audience. Mrs. Joan Blondell Powell—maiden name only on the screen—shows us again what an exceedingly clever young woman she is. If Dick doesn't mind, I must confess I fall more in love with his wife each time I see her on the screen. Glenda Farrell also adds greatly to the gaiety of the moment.

Another attractive young woman who shows much promise is Rosalind Marquis, and a young man who can make a place for himself on the screen as much for his personality as for his expert dancing is Lee Dixon. Osgood Perkins, Charles D. Brown, and William Davidson do their several bits toward piling up the good performances.

Max Parker, art director, and Orry-Kelly, gown designer, are responsible for much of the visual beauty of the production, and Leo Forbstein, musical director, is to be credited with a big share in making it so agreeable to listen to.

Handling the production of a picture presented on such an elaborate scale is a big job. Earl Baldwin proved himself equal to it and is entitled to credit for a great deal of the success *Gold Diggers* will have.

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## Has Too Many Angles

LLOYDS OF LONDON, 20th-Fox release of Darryl F. Zanuck production. Kenneth Macgowan, associate producer; directed by Henry King; screen play by Ernest Pascal and Walter Ferris; from a story by Curtis Kenyon; photographed by Bert Glennon; art direction, William Darling; sets by Thomas Little; assistant director, Robert Webb; film editor, Barbara McLean; costumes, Royer; musical director, Louis Silvers. Cast: Freddie Bartholomew, Madeleine Carroll, Sir Guy Standing, Tyrone Power, C. Aubrey Smith, Virginia Field, Forrester Harvey, George Sanders, Montagu Love, J. M. Kerrigan, Gavin Muir, Will Stanton, Douglas Scott, John Burton, Lumsden Hare, Una O'Connor, Miles Mander, Murray Kinnell, Ralph Cooper, Fay Chaldecott, Yorke Sherwood, May Beatty, Robert Grieg, Hugh Huntley, Billy Bevan, E. E. Clive, Elsa Buchanan, Georges Renevant, Lester Mathews, Arthur Hohl, Reginald Barlow, Charles Crocker King, Holmes Herbert. Running time, 115 minutes.

**M**AGNIFICENTLY produced, gorgeously photographed, splendidly acted and ably directed, *Lloyds of London* still remains a coldly episodic, documentary film lacking the emotional appeal a picture must have to make it entertainment acceptable to the great mass of people who patronize screen theatres. It picks up the great insurance concern sixty years after the death of the original Lloyd, and proceeds to endeavor to enlist our interest in four different story phases: the development and integrity of Lloyds, the life-long friendship of Anthony Blake and Lord Nelson, loyalty to England, and a romance between two young people. The various stages of the romance are acted with feeling by Madeleine Carroll and Tyrone Power, and admirably directed by Henry King. At times it enlists our sympathetic interest, but before our emotions are stirred by it, our attention is directed to some more material phase of the story.

The real continuity which makes a picture successful is not that which the film editor's shears provide for us to follow. It is emotional, not visual; spiritual not physical. *Lloyds*, owing to the various directions it points our attention, does not keep our emotional response alive, our interest continuous. It tells us a lot about the ideals, aims and purposes of the insurance concern, which we know to be a collection of the greatest gamblers on earth, and while such information is interesting from a purely informative standpoint, it scarcely is something we can be induced to enthuse over when presented as screen entertainment. We patronize pictures to be amused, not to be instructed.

**B**UT *Lloyds of London* certainly is worth seeing. The manner in which it is produced is enough in itself to justify your patronage. Technically it is a triumph. It brings a faraway yesterday to our eyes and peoples it with picturesquely attired men and women, many of them being among those who had their hands on the tiller to point the course of England's progress when it was being charted. It gets intimate at times, but leaves us up in the air when it ends. A member of the nobility shoots the principal character, but we are not told what was done with him. When our hero suffers, our wish is to see the villain suffering more. And we are left to guess how the romance ends. More than is the case with any other phase of the story, is our interest enlisted in the romance, but what comes of it we are not told. The last sequence

drags interminably. It is both acted and directed beautifully but it has nothing to do with any one of the four story points and is without legitimate place in the production.

As would have to be the case with such an outstanding director as Henry King, the performances are above criticism. Young Bartholomew sets a pace as the boy Blake which Power carries on as an adult in a manner which definitely establishes him as a leading man who will find great favor with the public. Miss Carroll, beautiful, intelligent, does full justice to the role of an aristocratic young woman in love with Power but married to George Sanders, a particularly unpleasant villain. Sir Guy Standing has perhaps the biggest part, and gives us what appealed to me as his best screen performance. The musical treatment provided by Louis Silvers is another excellent feature of the production, and to William Darling and Thomas Little go praise for the outstanding art direction and set designing.

## Sol Lesser Presents Bobby

RAINBOW ON THE RIVER, Radio release of Sol Lesser production for Principal. Stars Bobby Breen. Directed by Kurt Neumann; associate producer, Edward Gross; from novel, TOINETTE'S PHILIP, by Mrs. C. V. Jamison; screen play by Earle Snell, Harry Chandlee and William Hurlbut; added dialogue by Clarence Marks; musical settings conceived and directed by Hugo Riesenfeld; associate, Abe Meyer; photographed by Charles Schoenbaum; art director, Harry Oliver; associates, Lewis J. Rachmil and Earl Wooden; assistant director, George Sherman; film editor, Robert Crandall; music by Stephen Foster, Paul F. Webster and Louis Alter, Karl Hajos and Arthur Swanstrom, Hugo Riesenfeld and Selma Hautzik, Von Flothow, Franz Schubert. Supporting cast: May Robson, Charles Butterworth, Alan Mowbray, Benita Hume, Henry O'Neill, Louise Beavers, Marilyn Knowlden, Lillian Yarbo, Stymie Beard, Eddie Anderson, Betty Blythe, Theresa Maxwell Conover, Clarence Wilson, Lew Kelly, Lillian Harmer. Running time, 87 minutes.

**A**LL of us have heard *Swanee River* sung so often that we have become used to it and somewhat dulled to its beauty and sentiment. But when Bobby Breen sang it in *Rainbow on the River*, handkerchiefs were brought into play and the shuffling sound of released attention came from the big preview audience as the last soft notes floated away. There is a quality in Bobby's voice that goes straight to the hearts of his listeners, something he started with and which musical education merely is teaching him how to use. Sol Lesser is wise in presenting his youthful star as he does—not as a musical prodigy who can run up and down the scale like a monkey on a stick, but as a singer of melodies, of compositions we are familiar with and to which our emotions play sympathetic accompaniments on our heartstrings.

The story of *Rainbow* is an old fashioned one with elemental appeal to our emotions. One could wish for less adherence to old fashioned ideas in its screen treatments, for less dalliance on matters of no great moment, and characterizations etched in softer lines, but our patience with the frailties of the production is rewarded at the right intervals by Bobby's songs and the singing of the Hall Johnson choir and the St. Luke's choristers, an aggregation of lads with fine, fresh voices which it is a treat to hear. One commendable feature of the production is the good use it makes of the colored choir. The Hall

Johnson singers have been but subdued notes in most of the pictures in which they previously have appeared. Sol Lesser moves them to the front and gives us a more generous measure of their superb singing.

**K**URT NEUMANN has piloted Bobby through the two pictures he has made. I can imagine no direction which would present the diminutive star to better advantage. One of the charms of Bobby's singing is the obvious delight it gives him to sing for us, a feature of his performance that can be attributed to the sympathetic direction given him. Neumann presents him as an actor of ability as well as a vocalist of distinction. The direction develops all the sentimental possibilities of a script which makes no pretensions of being anything other than a sentimental appeal. The story drags in spots, but on the whole it is entertaining and the slowness is not due to the direction but rather to the screen play's close adherence to the old fashioned book from which it was taken. Harry Chandler, Clarence Marks and William Hurlbut made the most of the story values of the original and Sol Lesser gave the picture a comprehensive and pictorially impressive production.

I could have wished for a less cantankerous characterization than that given May Robson, but the heart of gold which underlies it finally comes to the surface to atone for the harsh exterior. Charles Butterworth is given an opportunity to be something other than an absolute ass. As the soft hearted, understanding butler he gives a finely etched performance which is a big factor in the success of the picture. Benita Hume is vivid as well as beautiful in the role as a mother who seeks to protect the interests of her daughter at the expense of the inoffensive Bobby. Alan Mowbray, as Benita's husband, gives his usual brilliant performance. Louise Beavers, the talented colored actress and fine looking woman, is a tower of strength to the cast. It is too bad more such parts can not be found for her. I never will forgive Dave Selznick if he does not cast her for Scarlett's mammy in *Gone With the Wind*.

Hugo Riesenfeld and associates are entitled to high praise for their musical contributions to *Rainbow on the River*, and are largely responsible for its being a picture you can not afford to miss.

## Quite a Long Way After

AFTER THE THIN MAN, Metro production and release. Hunt Stromberg, associate producer. Stars William Powell and Myrna Loy. Features James Stewart, Elissa Landi, Joseph Calleia, Alan Marshall, Sam Levene, Jessie Ralph, Teddy Hart, Dorothy McNulty. Directed by W. S. Van Dyke; screen play by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett; from story by Dashiell Hammett; musical score by Herbert Stothart and Edward Ward; songs by Nacio Herb Brown and Arthur Freed, Walter Donaldson, Chet Forrest and Bob Wright; dances staged by Seymour Felix; photographed by Oliver T. Marsh; film editor, Robert J. Kern; assistant director, Charles Dorian. Supporting cast: William Law, George Zucco. Running time, 110 minutes.

**A**PPARENTLY they can't come back. Metro's first *Thin Man* came as a delightful surprise to a public not expecting a murder mystery story to be told on the screen so smoothly and revealing such a lively sense of

humor. The picture made a lot of money, and no one can quarrel with the producers for trying to duplicate the first financial success. Of course, the public, now being aware of what to expect and anticipating another outstanding treat, would have to get a better picture than it had the first time if its expectations were to be met. It was a rather daring thing for Metro to undertake, success always being something to be satisfied with and a good thing to let alone.

The second *Thin Man* is a great deal thinner than the first. The same characters, the same people playing them, the same director in charge, manage only to squeeze out an inferior piece of screen entertainment. For one thing, Bill Powell, around whom the story revolves, is drunk for two-thirds of the footage. In almost every scene he has a glass of liquor in his hand, and not in one scene has the fact of his drunkenness any story significance. The millions of people who will patronize the picture with the expectation of seeing a brilliant detective brilliantly solving a baffling murder mystery, will see only a bemuddled sot playing with it, at his side a wife being amused by a condition she should resent. There may be entertainment in that for some people. I can give you only my personal reaction. I was bored all the way through the film.

**W**HEN Elissa Landi, playing the cousin of Myrna Loy, is arrested for murder, Powell and Myrna seem to regard it as a lark which they celebrate by a long, meaningless sequence starting in their bedroom and ending in their chasing their dog all over the house to retrieve a note attached to a stone hurled through their kitchen window when they were scrambling eggs. The only thing of story interest is the information contained in the note, but before the audience is acquainted with it the unfunny "comedy" of the chase pursues its weary way. That is all right in an out-and-out farce, but in this picture our interest is supposed to be in the unravelling of a major crime. Next morning, when Bill is sober, the thing goes on until sufficient footage has been secured, at which point the detective solves the problem by the simple expedient of telling what the solution is. We are not enlightened as to his method of reaching his conclusions, but we are left in no doubt about his capacity for strong drink and his agility at chasing a dog. All the real story there is in *After the Thin Man* would have found plenty of room to bump about in one reel without touching either end.

Murder is rather gruesome inspiration for six reels of farcical padding to one reel of story. But anything done cleverly enough can be given a legitimate place in a motion picture, even a mixture of murder and farce. When, however, the inspiration for clowning comes from constant drinking, when the man in the picture who should earn our greatest respect is an inebriated clown for the greater part of the footage, there is little entertainment for an audience desiring cleverness and logic in the presentation of the story. *After the Thin Man* will make money, a great deal of it, but in the long run it will prove an unwise investment for MGM. The first *Thin Man* will be responsible for the money; the second will be respon-



sible for a loss of box-office strength for William Powell and Myrna Loy as a team.

The direction of Woody Van Dyke is away short of his usual standard. The performances are as good as the story material permitted them to be. One dramatic scene by James Stewart is done excellently. Production and photography are of the high quality which distinguishes all Metro products.

## We Stumble on a Winner

IN HIS STEPS, Grand National Films, Inc., release. Produced by B. F. Zeidman; story suggested by Charles M. Sheldon's IN HIS STEPS; screen play by Karl Brown and Hinton Smith; direction by Karl Brown; production manager, Harold Lewis; photography, Harry Jackson; art director, Edward Jewell; sound engineer, Earl Sitar; music supervisor, Abe Meyer; special effects, Jack Cosgrove; film editor, Edward Schroeder. Cast: Eric Linden, Cecilia Parker, Harry Beresford, Clara Blandick, Roger Imhof, Olive Tell, Henry Kolker, Charles Richman, Robert Warwick.

SOME years ago Karl Brown directed a silent picture whose name I can not recall, but which impressed me so favorably I looked for further important films to come from him. They were not forthcoming, and I saw nothing else of his until the other evening, there being no preview scheduled, I took time out to enjoy myself by a change of routine which consisted of dropping into a picture house and sitting through both halves of a double bill. The second feature was one of the most satisfying pieces of entertainment it has been my good fortune to see this year. It was *In His Steps*, directed by Karl Brown, featuring Eric Linden and Cecilia Parker, produced by Benny Zeidman for Grand National. When I think of some of the pictures which are items on short programs in big houses, I feel for the fate of the admirable little *In His Steps* which must pursue its course of being an item on long programs in little houses. There is no cinema audience anywhere which would not respond gratefully to the human appeal of *In His Steps* and the sympathetic urge of the performances of the two young people who make the leading parts so vividly human.

CHARLES M. SHELDON'S best seller of its day was made into a cohesive, smoothly flowing screen play with all its human and dramatic possibilities richly developed. Brown's direction is flawless, so expert and understanding in all its phases that it makes me wonder why Hollywood so long has overlooked him. The theme is one which so easily could have been made into a picture leaning too heavily to sentiment, but the writing and direction admirably preserve a proper balance of its elements, with the result that we have a deeply moving drama that is both entertaining and thoughtful, and a collection of performances that no class A production has excelled this season. Cecilia and Eric, the sweethearts of *Ah, Wilderness!*, are sweethearts again, but rise to heights in the Zeidman picture only hinted at in previous screen appearances. Robert Warwick, as the judge who settles the fate of the two young people, gives a beautiful characterization, quiet, restrained, powerful in its simplicity. But you may look at the list above and credit each player with a completely competent performance.

Watch for *In His Steps* at your neighborhood house. It is clean, healthy entertainment that lends dignity to the screen.

## Nothing to Recommend It

CHAMPAGNE WALTZ, Paramount production and release. Produced by Harlan Thompson; directed by A. Edward Sutherland; screen play, Don Hartman and Frank Butler; from story by Billy Wilder and H. S. Kraft; assistant director, Russell Mathews; film editor, Paul Weatherwax; art direction, Hans Dreier and Ernest Fegte; photographed by William Mellor; dances by LeRoy Prinz; special photographic effects by Gordon Jennings and Lev Jennings; musical arrangements, Phil Boutelje; music by Johann Strauss; original songs by Frederick Hollander, Leo Robin, Ann Ronell, Sam Coslow, Burton Lane, Ralph Freed, William Daly. Cast: Gladys Swarthout, Fred MacMurray, Jock Oake, Veloz and Yolanda, Herman Bing, Fritz Leiber, Vivienne Osborne, Frank Forest, Benny Baker, Ernest Cossart, James Burke, Maude Eburne, Maurice Cass, Guy Bates Post. Running time, 93 minutes.

SURELY Paramount can find a story that will show Gladys Swarthout to better advantage than we have seen her in any of her three screen appearances. Recognized as a great singer, possessing a charming personality, being most agreeable to look at, she has, in *Champagne Waltz*, a story which gives only her beauty a chance, and credit for that goes to the camera. To ask an intelligent audience to follow the story and be convinced by its various angles, is to put a too great strain on it even as a part of Hurrah-for-Zukor-Week festivities. And it definitely lessens the pleasure her singing gives us. During the week the Paramount picture was previewed, I saw one in which Bobby Breen, an eight-year-old boy, sang; another in which Deanna Durbin, a fourteen-year-old girl, sang. I enjoyed the singing of the children much more than I did that of the Metropolitan Opera House star, not because they sang better, but because they were presented in a manner that earned my friendly interest in everything they did.

The measure of our enjoyment of one element of a screen creation must be affected by the extent of our enjoyment of the creation as a whole. Bobby and Deanna were presented in warmly human stories which held my interest, which earned my sympathy, made me love them and see only merit in everything they did. Their splendid singing was merely a high spot in my enjoyment; they were friends of mine, and I was rooting for them to make good. Miss Swarthout has to compete with chewing gum, extraneous comedy, impossible situations and a great deal of noise. We are discontented with the offering before she sings, have little interest in the story, and even her graciousness and fine voice are incapable of satisfying us with the picture as a whole.

THE story is laid in Vienna which suggests gay entertainment in waltz time. Fred MacMurry takes his American jazz band there and puts the Strauss waltzes out of business. He and Gladys fall in love with one another. She does not know he is the famous jazz hound. He is afraid to let her know, as she is a Strauss. Apparently it is his intention to marry her, but never to tell her who he is. When, however, she learns it, she spurns him, he returns to America and goes down and down

until the depths he reaches are vividly revealed to us by a close-up of each of his shoe soles with holes in them, quite the most absurd close-up the screen ever has shown us. But in Vienna Fred had taught Gladys to chew gum; she crosses his path in New York, and on the path is the wrapper of a stick of gum. It slays her, rekindles the fiery embers of her smoldering love and he mumbles a plea for forgiveness.

Then we have a preposterous mingling of a symphonic waltz orchestra with a quarter-acre jazz band, each with its own leader, and the resultant din is terrific. The combination will make musicians shudder. To me the only feature of the production that was really interesting was the performance of that capable comedian, Herman Bing. For the first time I could understand every word he uttered. I criticized some of his previous appearances on the score of my inability to follow his dialogue. Bing resented my remarks, but I hope he forgives me now. It was the only way I could think of to make him mad enough to show me he could speak plainly if he wanted to. And I hope my criticism of *Champagne Waltz* will make Paramount mad enough to show me it can make a good Swarthout picture if it wants to. To start with it has the advantage of knowing it would be mighty hard to make a worse one.

## Jimmy Cagney Limp Back

**GREAT GUY**, Grand National release. Producer, Douglas MacLean; direction, John G. Blystone; story, James Edward Grant; screen play, Henry McCarthy and Henry Johnson; additional dialogue, Harry Ruskin; photography, Jack MacKenzie; musical direction, Marlin Skiles; film editor, Russell Schoengarth. Cast: James Cagney, Mae Clark, James Burke, Edward Brophy, Henry Kolker, Bernadene Hayes, Edward McNamara, Robert Gleckler, Joseph Sawyer, Edward Gargan, Matty Fain, Mary Gordon, Wallis Clark, Douglas Wood.

**WHEN** I see a picture of this sort I am curious to know how people with any degree of screen intelligence can read the script and not spot its weak points. Cagney, chief deputy of the Bureau of Weights and Measures, works up a case against Henry Kolker, boss crook. The case is set forth in a typewritten statement. One of Kolker's strong-arm men holds up Jimmy and takes the papers away from him. The whole story is an effort to get the papers back so that Henry can be sent to jail, for without them, Jimmy sadly laments, the authorities have no case. The first question one would ask after reading the script, would be regarding the location of the carbon copies of the typewritten sheets and certified copies of the documentary evidence. Perhaps the makers of the picture know, but as they were not sitting in my lap while I was viewing it, I could not whisper to them a request for the information that would have made everything clear.

We are left to assume the city officials in the story conduct their business in a manner inconsistent with established business principles. We must grant them that privilege, but the harm it does the picture is that we can not take seriously the complications arising from their unorthodox methods, nor can we sympathize with the mental anguish the officials suffer because of their queer

way of doing things. All the strength a screen story possesses is the soundness of its premise. There are many good scenes in *Great Guy*, much good acting, and the direction throughout is satisfactory, but the story suggests too many questions that are not answered. One of the primary rules of all arts is that no creation should prompt a question it itself does not answer. No matter how well painted a landscape is, it is not a good work of art if it leaves us in doubt as to why the painter put that tree in that particular spot.

Other story weaknesses of *Great Guy* are interpolated comedy which checks its progress, a romance which has no connection with the main events, and a fight which takes place after the story has ended. The only thing of interest in it is that it is the best performance Cagney yet has given us. Henry Kolker, Robert Gleckler and Joseph Sawyer also give excellent performances.

## Makes Too Many Detours

**BELOVED ENEMY**, United Artists release of Samuel Goldwyn production. George Haight, associate producer. Co-stars Merle Oberon and Brian Aherne. Directed by Henry C. Potter. Features Karen Morley, Henry Stephenson, Jerome Cowan, David Niven. Original story by John Balderston; screen play by John Balderston, Rose Franken, William Brown Meloney; additional dialogue by David Hertz; cameraman, Gregg Toland; musical director, Alfred Newman; costumes, Omar Kiam; art director, Richard Day; sets, Julia Heron; film editor, Sherman Todd; assistant director, Eddie Bernoudy. Supporting cast: Donald Crisp, Ra Hould, Granville Bates, P. J. Kelly, Leo McCabe, Pat O'Malley, Jack Mulhall, Claude King, Theodore von Eltz, Wyndham Standing, Robert Strange, Lionel Pape, John Burton, Leyland Hodgson, David Torrence. Running time, 90 minutes.

**WHEN** Sam Goldwyn gave us *These Three* he sought to center our attention on one story point: the havoc in the lives of three people wrought by the malicious tongue of a child. When he gave us *Dodsworth* we had to engage our attention only the drifting apart of a husband and wife. In *Come and Get It* we were not allowed to lose sight of the theme, a simple one of the love of a middle-aged married man for a woman young enough to be his daughter. In his latest picture, *Beloved Enemy*, no such ease in following the story is provided. We know, of course, it is primarily a romance, for practically all pictures are that, but here we have the love interest completely smothered for the greater part of the footage by the revolution which led to the establishment of the Irish Free State. At least, that is what I suppose all the fighting was about.

**RKO'S** *Informer* had a similar background, but it centered our attention on the fate of one man and never let our attention wander from him. As we watched John Ford's superbly directed picture we knew at all times what was happening and why. *Beloved Enemy* does not explain anything. We are not told what point is at issue between England and Ireland. The official capacity of none of the principals is revealed to us. A delegation goes from Ireland to England and sits in conference with a group of Englishmen whose official status is not made clear. Those familiar with British governmental procedure will surmise the conference takes place at 10 Downing Street and that one of the men is the prime minister, but, if so, it is a surprisingly small cabinet over which he

presides and to which Henry Stephenson makes his report upon his return from Ireland which he visited in an effort to advance peace.

**T**HE picture has the usual Goldwyn complete and pictorially effective production and is cast with the discriminating care which Sam always exercises; the performances are in every way satisfactory, but the story emphasizes too many points which have no bearing on the romance and suggests too many questions it does not answer. The presence of the Irish delegation to England has story value only by virtue of its bringing Brian Aherne again into contact with Merle Oberon, but the audience is taken into several sessions of the conference without being informed on one point at issue between the two parties. If it is not necessary that we should get such information, it was not necessary to take us into the conference room.

Romantic scenes which are scattered through the footage are well acted and well directed, developing at times emotional force. The effect of one love scene is lessened by sacrificing its scenic composition to showing the two heads of the lovers completely filling the screen. The eye of the camera is the eye of the audience, and for us to see the heads as large comparatively as they appear on the screen, our noses would have to be pressed against the cheeks of the lovers. The shot reveals a sad lack of understanding of the mission of the close-up and detracts from the sentimental value of the love scene. Aherne's death at the end of the picture will not go well with the majority of audiences. As is the case with too many other scenes, it seems to have been included for its own value as an isolated fragment and without consideration for its status as but one link in the story chain. Perhaps it was inspired by some incident in the Irish uprising, but when we view a motion picture we wish to be entertained, and a lover dying does not end a romance in the manner in which we like to see one end.

Merle Oberon's role is almost entirely negative, but her performance is appealing. Others who give excellent performances are Aherne, Karen Morley, Henry Stephenson, Jerome Cowan, David Niven and Donald Crisp. H. C. Potter's direction is as expert a job as one could wish for, and the weaknesses of the picture are not to be credited to him. Gregg Toland's photography is outstanding.

## Melodrama That Is Different

**CRACK-UP**, 20th-Fox production and release. Samuel G. Engel, associate producer. Directed by Malcolm St. Clair. Features Peter Lorre, Brian Donlevy, Helen Wood, Ralph Morgan and Thomas Beck. Screen play by Charles Kenyon and Sam Mintz; original story by John Goodrich; photographed by Barney McGill; assistant director, Aaron Rosenberg; film editor, Fred Allen; song by Sidney Clare and Harry Akst; musical director, Samuel Kaylin. Supporting cast: Kay Linaker, Lester Matthews, Earl Foxe, J. Carrol Naish, Gloria Roy, Oscar Apfel, Paul Stanton, Howard Hickman. Running time, 65 minutes.

**O**WING to the film industry's folly in teaching the public to patronize names instead of motion pictures, this one will not receive the attention it deserves. It is not fashioned on the lines of the usual run of pictures. In the last sequence the three leading characters are

drowned, and the longest continuous sequence takes place in the cabin of an airplane. It is a long time since I have seen a picture directed by Malcolm St. Clair. If this is the first he has done during that time, he certainly was handed a tough one as his come-back effort. Given four men confined in a small space, a director has to display rare skill in keeping alive our interest in them. St. Clair deftly takes care of the difficult situation. All his direction, in fact, is competent and there seems no reason why he should not achieve the prominence in talkies that he earned by the ability he displayed in directing silents.

*Crack-Up* has no standard hero. The two leading parts are played by an unscrupulous foreigner and a grafting American. Each of them commits a murder. It is a melodrama played in a subdued key. The opening sequences show us a collection of characters who disappear before we can get them sorted out and most of whom we do not see again. It is all very perplexing, and the picture travels quite a distance before we know what it is about. The country which is trying to steal the plans of the new American super airplane is, of course, given no identity, but the rigid Germanic bows of Earl Foxe and the equally Germanic atmosphere developed by William von Brincken, added to the repetition of "Herr Baron," no doubt will make *Crack-Up* live up to its name if an attempt be made to show it in Hitlerland.

**O**NE could wish for a smaller dose of dialogue in the development of the story. The screen seems to be drifting farther away from its true mission of presenting its stories with the camera and using the microphone as sparingly as possible. If pictures still were silent, such experienced writers as Charles Kenyon and Sam Mintz would have told the same story with little reliance on spoken titles. Even today, nine-tenths of the dialogue we hear in *Crack-Up* could have been eliminated by combined writing and directorial technique to make it unnecessary for us to hear none but essential speeches.

Peter Lorre's performance is a duplicate of those we have seen in his previous pictures. The impression he gives me is that he always is an actor playing a part. I admire the deftness of his characterizing, but I never can accept him as the person he is playing. Thomas Beck, a youth apparently with little experience, is far more convincing because he creates the impression that he is doing his best to handle situations that previously had been outside the range of his experiences. The same is true of Helen Wood. She is the girl she is playing, never the actress. We can not find fault with what she does on the score that Katharine Cornell would do it differently. Helen is a stenographer faced with situations new to her, and she reacts to them as a stenographer, not an actress, would react. That is the difference between stage and screen acting. Ralph Morgan handles his role with the ease and understanding that make all his screen appearances convincing. Brian Donlevy contributes an impressive characterization.

Samuel G. Engel, producer in charge, is to be commended for the results he achieved. The production is an outstanding one and Barney Gill's photography does it full justice.

## Direction Did It

THE GREAT O'MALLEY, Warner Bros. picture. Associate producer, Harry Joe Brown; directed by William Dieterle; assistant director, Frank Shaw; screen play by Milton Krims and Tom Reed; based on story by Gerald Beaumont; photographed by Ernest Haller; film editor, Warren Low; dialogue director, Irving Rapper; art director, Hugh Reticker; gowns by Milo Anderson; musical direction by Leo F. Forbstein. Cast: Pat O'Brien, Humphrey Bogart, Ann Sheridan, Frieda Inescort, Sybil Jason, Donald Crisp, Henry O'Neill, Craig Reynolds, Hobart Cavanaugh, Gordon Hart, Mary Gordon, Mabel Colcord, Frank Sheridan, Lillian Harmer, Delmar Watson and Frank Reicher. Running time, 71 minutes.

*Reviewed by Paul Jacobs*

**T**HIS review is written for the student in particular, and for producers in general. *The Great O'Malley* is vivid proof of SPECTATOR credo. I spent the entire evening in a growing glow of virtuous content, and a smug series of mental applause for Mr. Beaton.

In the first place, *The Great O'Malley* is so antiquated it creaks. A story of the resurrection of a man's soul, the plot is easily guessable from the start. But the entire audience enjoyed every scintillating moment. This seeming contradiction of story law finds its explanation in the SPECTATOR's oft repeated truism: *It is not the story, but the manner in which it is told.* William Dieterle's masterful artistry created a fascinating illusion; so deft were the etchings of life, so complete the portraiture, that never once during the running time could the intellect penetrate the veil of illusion. Thus not until the lights went up could I realize that I had read a dozen stories and seen two dozen pictures with basically the same plot.

**B**UT Director Dieterle's genius was well supported. Film Editor Warren Low has done as smooth a job as Dieterle's direction. I cannot say more than that by way of praise. A suave, modful rhythm, perfectly tempoed, and accelerated only by the story movement itself, is priceless. Warren Low has an ardent new fan in me. In keeping with these masterpieces, Ernest Haller's photography is splendid, creating the uniform visual niceities that blot out the fact that we are sitting in a theatre and looking raptly at nothing more than a series of images. Photography is the generating source of the reality illusion; no direction can compensate for its misuse. To Ernest Haller, then, goes no little part of the credit for this film's technical excellence.

Irving Rapper has sustained the high technical standard *The Great O'Malley* sets, by his sensible and well-proportioned dialogue.

**A**ND Scripters Milton Krims and Tom Reed have compensated for their faintly bromidic adaptation of Gerald Beaumont's original, by their intelligent injection of deep thematic treatment. With sweeping vigor they bring out the rich human truth upon which the plot is built. The audience is responsively sympathetic to Pat O'Brien and to Sybil Jason, not only for their truly expert performances, but because the vibrant and heart-warming theme draws audience and actors alike into its common wealth.

The entire cast is splendid, giving a uniform excellence of characterization. I have typed for a solid quarter of

an hour, and said "excellent" in as many ways as my vocabulary and a sense of euphony permitted. Were I to enumerate the cast, my comments would merely repeat themselves. Read the credits and chalk up the long list of "corking," "swell" and so on, yourselves. Or better, still, see *The Great O'Malley* and find your own encomiums. You will enjoy every minute, you will realize that old material can be made to live again, and you will give hearty thanks to Producer Harry Joe Brown.

## Never Mind This One

MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS, a Paramount picture produced by Emanuel Cohen. Stars Charlie Ruggles and Alice Brady. Directed by Norman McLeod; screen play and dialogue by Dore Schary; from original by John Francis Larkin; photographed by Robert Pittack; sound by William Fox; film editor, George McGuire; art director, Wiard Ihnen; costumes by Basia Bassett; musical direction by George Stoll. Supporting cast: Lyle Talbot, Benny Baker, Jack La Rue, Frankie Darro, Robert Baldwin, Lloyd Crane, Horace Stewart, William Demarest, Gene Lockhart, Charles Wilson, William Davidson, Paul Harvey, Duke York, Theodore von Eltz, David Sharp, Los Angeles Troop No. 107 of Boy Scouts of America. Running time, 76 minutes.

*Reviewed by Paul Jacobs*

**E**MANUEL COHEN'S newest for Paramount is decidedly on the off-side. Provided with an accomplished cast and capable direction by Norman McLeod, *Mind Your Own Business* misses fire only because scripter Dore Schary forgot his audience when he translated author John Francis Larkin's original. Of the turning-worm idea, it lacks the vital requisites for this particular story form. In the first place, suspense was held to a minimum; whereas suspenseful surprise is the chief factor in building progressive interest in this type. The audience was never allowed the gasps of joyous relief which would have stepped up the intervals between the comic high-points.

Further, the flavor of what little suspense remained was soured by the use of obvious and timed coincidence. Every phase of the complicated rescue, for example, was evidently supervised by the hand of an alert and benevolent fate. A screen writer should know that the *deus ex machina* is dramatically dead and has been verboten since the decline of the Greek tragedy.

**A**ND finally, Mr. Schary did not realize that undue or noticeable maukishness is immediately resented by an audience when it concerns a public ideal. The Boy Scout stuff at one or two times almost touched the point of being maudlin.

As was to be expected, Charlie Ruggles and Alice Brady turned in scintillating performances. Lyle Talbot spoiled his good work by constantly shouting his lines. Jack La Rue gives us his usual nastiness in an excellently disgusting manner. That fine little actor, Frankie Darro, was given no opportunity to please us. And one of my favorites, George Ernest, is not even in the credits. The support is thoroughly believable, with Theodore Von Eltz contributing the most brilliant bit in the picture.

I can shed at least one ray of sunshine on *Mind Your Own Business*. The technical end was smoothly and pleasingly handled. Praises are due for Robert Pittack's photography, for Wiard Ihnen's art direction; and Film

Editor George McGuire would be in line for a deserved share had he not allowed two obvious lapses in the time-and-place unities. For example, the Scouts, in what could be no more than early afternoon, sight a cabin about a quarter of a mile ahead. By the time they reach it it is full night.

## New York Spectacle

By Frederick Stone

New York, December 14.

**F**ORMAL criticism of a work of art must—in nations less enlightened than Germany—present the critic's final impression of it as a whole. *The Charge of the Light Brigade* has been accorded formal criticism by Welford Beaton in this paper, and by motion picture critics in general, and it would now be superfluous for me to discuss this picture in such terms. I should only be adding my small praise to the universal applause, and, coming as it would at a time when the applause had somewhat subsided, I should present the saddening spectacle of a man who sees the point at last and cries out with pleasure long after the rest of the company has turned to other things. Therefore I will try rather to recall the company from its further thoughts for a moment, not to agree on a question already settled for us all, but to discuss certain aspects of this film which I found unusually annoying. I trust that the following remarks will be regarded, not as dissenting, but as purely parenthetical.

My chief quarrel with *The Charge of the Light Brigade* is that many of its shots and sequences are confusing. In many places it is difficult to follow the action closely without focussing the mind sharply upon the event so as to be sure what, exactly, is intended. As has so often been emphasized in the editorial columns of the SPECTATOR, films are a relaxing medium of entertainment, and special mental effort should not be required in order to understand them. This is true of films in general, but it is most particularly in point in the case of the purely narrative film, where the charm of the entertainment lies in the fact that absolutely no thought is necessary in order to follow the action. Thus, in the case in question, where we have a film of pure narrative action, it is imperative that the action be clear at every turn. The more pure in action a film is, the more distressing becomes any doubt as to the precise meaning of the action.

**O**N THE Fourth of July we sit enthralled by the fireworks which startle the darkened sky. Here is visual motion in its purest form. Burst upon burst, shower upon shower, shock and delight our senses. We give ourselves wholly to emotion unsullied by earth-worn thought, and we have a wonderful time. So it is with the action, the visual motion, in the purely narrative film. But suddenly, to return to the analogy, we come to that inevitable moment in the evening when the heroics take on a more specifically patriotic tone, and we are subjected to the spluttering pyrotechnical portraits of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, set against the background of a slightly uncertain American flag.

We cheer out of chauvinistic compunction and because we are in a pretty good mood anyway, but the fact is that our enjoyment of the sight is somewhat dimmed because we are having a hard time figuring out which one is Washington and which is Lincoln.

From the abstract pleasure of the emotions we have suddenly been swept into the immediate pain of intellectual doubt; it is only through concentrating our minds upon the situation that we can again be liberated to our emotions. Fancy cannot roam while it is chained down to the uneasy conscience of a logical mind, and when we are brought back suddenly to earth by the necessity of deducing that the flaming portrait on the left must be that of Washington because he preceded Lincoln in our history, the evening's fun has been a little spoiled. To use another analogy, if we are reading an absorbing story of adventure and come suddenly upon a few lines of blurred print, the effect is the same. So it is with the purely narrative film, which must never for a moment allow the pace to slacken by forcing us into mental hesitation and analysis.

**W**HEN this happens in the cinema the danger is greatly aggravated by the fact that the spectator must choose between pausing to ponder the hiatus at the risk of losing the full flavor and purport of the following action, and ignoring it at the risk of finding the subsequent action unintelligible. The reader who is forced to stop in the midst of an exciting passage in order to decipher a few blurred lines is considerably annoyed, but he can always take up where he left off; his annoyance is as nothing compared with the rage aroused in the more thoughtful members of an audience when a picture puts them into the dilemma I have mentioned above. Directors who complain that there is so little first rate intelligence in motion picture audiences should take somewhat greater pains not to insult what little there is.

Anyone who has read as far as this will, by now, be clamoring for cases. The number of instances I have in mind are more than I have time or space to mention, but I will give several of those which disturbed me the most. When Errol Flynn rides back to his company in the dress of a tribal chieftain, his men mistake him for one of the enemy and shoot at him. Flynn and his horse fall to the ground. We think, naturally, that he or his horse has been hit, and for a moment we are left in suspense as to which it is. But no: Errol arises unhurt and runs to his friends, and the horse gets up unhurt and runs to his friends. We are surprised, we stop and give some puzzled thought to why horse and rider fell if neither was hit, and if we think about it long enough to realize that there was no reason whatever for it, we become indignant, our mood is shattered, and it is some time before our protesting minds will give our emotions back to the ensuing action. Had the horse been made to stay down, as if dead, there would have been no question in our minds—and in view of the general slaughter of horses in this film it seems inconceivable that, with common sense and logic at stake, our feelings for this particular animal should have been spared.

To give another instance: When the survivors of the

Chukoti garrison have been tricked into leaving the fort and are taking refuge on the river barges, the Amir treacherously opens fire upon them. We see a shot of the soldiers and their families floundering about in the river, at the mercy of the Khan's rifles on the hill. Next we see a close view of Elsa and an Indian struggling in the water. We naturally suppose that this Indian is a member of the garrison, and that he is trying to help Elsa away from danger. Flynn comes wading up, however, and stabs the Indian in the back—and we realize only then that he must have been one of Surat Khan's men. But we are horrified for a moment at this stabbing, which seems so illogical. A simple shot showing the Khan's men advancing down the slope into the river would have obviated this misunderstanding. As it was, we thought that all the hostile Indians were still up on the hill, and since Elsa appeared to be struggling against the situation in general rather than against the Indian in particular, the stabbing seemed extremely ungracious.

Again, the movement of the principals from place to place is not always clear. For instance, when Elsa, who is at Chukoti, learns that her fiance is coming there, she leaves the fort and goes to another British outpost where she knows she will meet her lover. In the next sequence we see the two together, but in the sequence which follows we see the attack upon Chukoti and discover that Elsa, mysteriously, has returned to the fort. We were not shown that she returned, or why she did. The brothers, too, are moved about rapidly from one place to another throughout the film, and although all of these goings and comings may have been clear to the director, they were not all clear to me.

**T**O give one final example on this score, let me say that at the close of the picture my companion and I had a lively dispute. She thought that Errol's brother had gone off to join the six hundred, while I maintained that he had gone with the other forces to aid in the attack upon Sevastopol. When two people can disagree upon an important point in the action, it is obvious that the action could not have been very clear. The film, too, is badly knit together. In many cases there is no tie-up between the actions, where a minimum of finger-pointing would have clarified matters and removed the least possibility of doubt. The changes in location, also, are often too rapid, which heightens the confusion. While precipitate changes of scene add to the pace of a narrative film, they must not be so abrupt as to give us a sense of geographical delirium.

Before bringing this complaint to a close, I should like to mention one other point, which once again illustrates my contention that although a continuous musical score is generally better than occasional pointed music, there are times when the absence of music is deliberately effective. I have pointed out in another article how valuable this treatment was in the hospital scene of *To Mary With Love*.

**W**HEN, in the picture under discussion, the charge is over, a stanza of Tennyson's poem is put on the screen, and we read it for a long moment to the accompaniment

of the film's musical theme. If there had been no music at all at this point, the reading of the poem would have been far more effective. If the wild discords of the charge and the crashing chords of the theme had faded as the last few lancers fell and the charge came to an end, if they had faded into deathly silence when the poem reached the screen, then the pulsating momentum and the contrast would have made the lines exceptionally poignant and devotional. In continuing the music through the reading of the poetry this effect was lost, and a great opportunity went glimmering. Furthermore, poetry has a rhythm of its own, and the rhythm of the music inevitably clashed with the rhythm of the lines.

To sum up, the nearer a work of art approaches perfection, the more annoying do any blemishes, although trivial in themselves, become. When a perfect picture is so nearly within reach, it is criminal to make blunders which a little fastidiousness in production could easily have avoided or corrected. Shortly after the charge of the Light Brigade was made, the French General Bosquet remarked, "C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre". The charge, he said, was magnificent, but it was not exactly good military strategy. Likewise I might say, in closing, that *The Charge of the Light Brigade* is magnificent, but I shall have to add, no doubt in the face of many protests, that it is not exactly good cinema.

## Readers Write

### From Barbara to an Admirer

Dear Mr. Beaton:

I have a message for William Cartright, the ten-year-old gentleman who wrote you the interesting letter which included, "do you no barabara stanick. I think shes swell." I would like him to know that I read his letter and think it is swell, and I also think he must be a pretty swell fellow. If you will tell him that for me, I will appreciate it.—*Barbara Stanswyck*.

### C. B. Is Willing to Divide

Dear Welford:

I recall the conversation to which you referred in your review of *The Plainsman* in the SPECTATOR to hand today. It is true you urged me to make the Western, but as to the amount of credit due you—well, that is another question. However, I wish to be fair about it and this is what I propose: I will keep all the profits and you can have all the credit.—*Cecil B. de Mille*.

### Frank McDonald Is Modest

Dear Mr. Beaton:

Please accept my sincere thanks for the many flattering references to my direction of *Smart Blonde* in your review in the current SPECTATOR. I can not, however, accept all the praise. A large share of it belongs to you. I am a persistent cover-to-cover reader of the SPECTATOR, and in all my direction of pictures I am governed largely by the opinions expressed by you in your reviews and general comments on the making of pictures. Many times when I approach the direction of scenes I recall something you have written about similar situations and I shoot them accordingly, consequently when you praise my work you are merely paying tribute to the soundness of your own convictions. I am glad you think so highly of *Smart Blonde*, but I can not accept credit for many of the things in it that are there only because I followed your advice. You will have to take some of the bows.—*Frank McDonald*.

*It appears that in my review of Frank's picture I failed to give him praise for another feature of it—his willingness to accept advice he thought was good.*

### After All, It's An Ill Wind—

To plug up the hole in your subscription list caused by Mervyn Le Roy's cancellation because you roasted *Three Men on a Horse*, find enclosed my check for twenty-five dollars. Whenever my subscription expires extend it for one year, and send the SPECTATOR for a year as Christmas presents to the four names attached. I don't see that Mervyn has any kick coming. For something high and fancy in the way of a roasting review I refer him to your remarks on my direction of ——. I don't think you were altogether right, but I do know you were altogether honest, and that is the best break any of us can ask for. Merry Christmas to you and Mrs. Spectator and to the SPECTATOR itself.—, *Hollywood*.

...I suppose I would have sent in my subscription some time anyway, but you can thank Mervyn Le Roy for the fact that I am doing it now.—*Santa Monica*.

...If you pay salesmen who secure new subscribers for you, send the commission on these three to that director who got mad at you and quit you cold.—*Hollywood*.

Up to the time of writing, commissions are due Le Roy on seventeen new subscriptions. We appreciate greatly the friendly feeling for the SPECTATOR which prompted the unexpected response to what we offered as merely a facetious plea for someone to take Le Roy's place on our subscription list.

### Also In the Class

It's a small world after all! I read with interest your account of Mr. Amherst's student to whom you awarded a year's subscription. Imagine my surprise, since my son is also a member of Mr. Amherst's cinema class; and we are also tyrannized by your selection of pictures. My son brings his copy of the SPECTATOR home from class and we attend only those pictures you recommend.

I thought you might be interested to know that my family and I along with Mr. Amherst's class, consider the SPECTATOR the final voice in film criticism.—*George Cressey, Chicago*.

### To Her, Names Not Important

Mr. R. H. C. in one of your recent SPECTATORS, comments that an agent with whom he had been speaking said that Hollywood did not want story ideas but names. This seems a little confusing to me in as much as I am typical of the average "public"... and the names on most of the films mean nothing at all to me. It is not unusual to see hundreds of unknown names flashed on the screen weekly, and these names are never remembered—but the production as a whole is. In my opinion a name is only important in relation to an individual's merited good work. A good story by itself can make history—but one's name by itself cannot.—*Patricia Holt, Madison, Wis.*



ADELE COMANDINI

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# FRANK McDONALD

Directed

## SMART BLONDE

For Warner Brothers

McDONALD'S direction has the precious quality of making us believe the characters are ad libbing, that they are making their own speeches, not delivering them. . . . And of all the big fellows in the business, I can think of none who could have given **Smart Blonde** better direction than young Frank McDonald gave it.—**Welford Beaton, Hollywood Spectator.**

CRISP and careful direction by McDonald holds good pace, sustains the suspense, feeds the mystery of elements in with the comedy and physical excitements for deft balance, and keeps the characters in legitimate behavior throughout—**Daily Variety.**

Now Directing  
**HER HUSBAND'S SECRETARY**  
For Warner Brothers



*Hollywood*

20  
CENTS

**S P E C T A T O R**

Eleventh Year

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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Volume 11

JANUARY 2, 1937

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*Spectator Writers Present  
Their Individual Selections  
for First Honors among the  
Motion Pictures Viewed by  
Them During the Year 1936*



REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

REMBRANDT .. ONE IN A MILLION .. GOD'S COUNTRY AND THE WOMAN  
..... STOWAWAY ..... GIRL FROM PARIS ..... STOLEN HOLIDAY .....  
WAY OUT WEST ..... COLLEGE HOLIDAY ..... THE HOLY TERROR

*The Plough and the Stars*

— Reviewed by Frederick Stone

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THE SPECTATOR WISHES ITS READERS A HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR

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**JACK BENNY**

**DOLLY TREE**

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER



  
**DAVE GOULD**  
METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER



**DUDLEY  
NICHOLS**

Screen Play

**THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS**



**HARRY  
HAMILTON**

**METRO - GOLDWYN - MAYER**



**ROBERT NORTH**

**PRODUCING**

**for**

**PARAMOUNT**



**GENE LEWIS**

**DIRECTING DIALOGUE**

**for**

**WARNER BROTHERS.**

**FIRST NATIONAL**



Greetings to  
All My Friends  
in the Industry

**LLOYD NOLAN**

**T**O ALL the Men and Women of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, so Helpful and Friendly to me for Seven Years, My Eternal Gratitude.

SAMUEL MARX



Greetings

**EDWARD  
ARNOLD**

UNDER PERSONAL CONTRACT TO  
B. P. SCHULBERG

REPRESENTATION : BERG · ALLENBERG

**J**OIN the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League in defense of American Democracy and help to keep alive the liberal spirit in Hollywood

•  
◆  
**FRANK LLOYD**

PRODUCING - DIRECTOR

**MAID OF SALEM**

FOR PARAMOUNT  
◆  
•

# Best of Last Year's Productions



## BY THE EDITOR

**WHAT** picture will be selected by Academy members as the best of the 1936 crop? There are a number of questions the members will have to ask themselves before they can pick the winner. Is *The Great Ziegfeld* a better picture than *Camille*? Is *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* better than *The Green Pastures*? Is *My Man Godfrey* better than *The White Angel*? Is *Romeo and Juliet* better than *The Ghost Goes West*? What is a motion picture? During the year I have reviewed two hundred and one film productions and saw but two motion pictures, *Ecstasy* and *Song of China*. I do not expect either of the two to receive consideration from the Academy, yet if the award goes to the best *motion picture*, one of them must get it. Even judging from the standard of the best *attraction*, there is the same difficulty in picking the winner. How can one compare *Nine Days a Queen* with *San Francisco*, *Rose Marie* with *These Three*? The thing simply can not be done. It would be on a par with comparing split-pea soup with orange marmalade or lamb chops with waffles.

Jack Alicoate's *Film Daily* asked me to join other reviewers in nominating the "ten best" of last year. Judging them as they have been judged since the film industry ceased making motion pictures and substituted talkies for them, the list I sent *Film Daily*, alphabetically arranged, is: *Ah, Wilderness!*, *Captain Blood*, *The Ghost Goes West*, *The Great Ziegfeld*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *Nine Days a Queen*, *San Francisco*, *Story of Louis Pasteur* and *The White Angel*. This list was compiled from the titles provided by the paper, which did not include pictures I have seen since it was compiled, but does include four I reviewed late in 1935, *Dream*, *Bounty*, *Pasteur* and *Wilderness*, none of which is included in this estimate of 1936 product.

**BUT** if you are to exclude consideration of motion picture principles as a factor in our judging, on what basis can we compare talkies? Are we to give W. S. Van Dyke credit for the direction of the best picture of the year because the Metro technical department supplied *San Francisco* with the greatest physical thrill of years? Was that picture a better job than *My Man Godfrey*, in the making of which Gregory La Cava had nothing to work with but cast, script and a sense of humor? He had no devastating earthquake to hurl at us, but, in its own way, his picture held its audience as closely as did the earthquake epic. I would put down *San Francisco* as the outstanding thrill picture of the year, and place *Godfrey* high on the list of comedies. There is no basis on which we can compare them to put one above the other if we have but one award to bestow. And so it goes. The only way we can estimate intelligently the merits of 1935 productions is to divide them into classes and compare those in each class with others in the same class, thus avoiding

putting *San Francisco* and *Godfrey* side by side and judging their relative merits.

First, let us scan the year's output of each producing organization and determine what entries it has in the contest for honors in the various classifications. As Hollywood has ceased making motion pictures, our judging will have to be on the basis of entertainment—on the basis of the kind of pictures we are getting and without regard for their cinematic integrity. We will take the companies alphabetically.

## COLUMBIA

**DURING** 1935 I reviewed only four Columbia pictures, and to three of them we must give high rating. Taking them in order, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* without question is one of the most entertaining pictures of the year. It is in a class by itself, a whimsical comedy with a serious social theme underlying its whimsy. Brilliantly directed by Frank Capra, admirably acted by Gary Cooper, Jean Arthur and a strong cast, handsomely mounted by its producers, it is not surpassed for pure merit by any other picture reviewed in the SPECTATOR during the year. *Theodora Goes Wild*: A delightfully crazy comedy, directed with a keen sense of humor by Richard Boleslawski, it runs *My Man Godfrey* a close second for honors as the cleverest absurd comedy of the year. *Pennies from Heaven*: Directed by Norman McLeod, with Bing Crosby and Madge Evans. One of the year's most appealing musical pictures; approaches at times pure cinema by giving our imaginations opportunities to function.

## GAUMONT-BRITISH

**SIX** pictures reviewed, two outstanding. *Nine Days a Queen*: I place this at the head of the list of the year's costume pictures. It is more deeply human, of greater emotional strength than any production in the same classification made over here. In my review I said, "Its real hero is the camera," a tribute I can not recall having paid any other talkie during the year. Sumptuously produced, intelligently directed by Robert Stevenson, superbly acted by a strong cast, and photographed artistically, it lacked only names known in this country to have made it an outstanding box-office attraction. *Rhodes, the Empire Builder*: one of the year's important pictures, directed ably by Berthold Viertel, with a cast headed by Walter Huston and Oscar Homolka, it rates next to *The White Angel* as the best biographical picture of the year.

## METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

**FOURTEEN** reviewed. *The Great Ziegfeld*: The greatest spectacle of the year, an entertaining story woven through it, fine direction by Robert Leonard, nothing in its class approaching it. *San Francisco*: Made into great entertainment by an earthquake, Jeanette MacDonald's singing, acting of a strong cast, fine photography, and

expert direction by W. S. Van Dyke. Easily the winner in the physical-thrill class, not alone by virtue of the thrill, but by the manner in which an overwhelming catastrophe is given story significance because of its bearing on the romance of two people for whom it enlists our interest. *Rose Marie*: Another Van Dyke. The year's finest screen presentation of a musical play; geographical sweep, superb photography, more of Jeanette MacDonald's singing and that of Nelson Eddy; our first glimpse of James Stewart who makes a small part a dramatic treat. *Wife Versus Secretary*: A conventional social drama made important by the understanding direction of Clarence Brown. *Gorgeous Hussy*: More of Brown's direction; a period picture of historical importance; one of Joan Crawford's most appealing performances.

Another Metro offering which helps to make the year a notable one is *Romeo and Juliet*. I place *Nine Days a Queen* above it in the costume class because the Shakespearean picture failed to move me emotionally and the other did, and in this review of reviews I must, of course, be governed only by my reactions to what I saw during the year. It would be strange indeed if many SPECTATOR readers agreed with all my selections. *Camille*: Although a costume picture, I place it in competition with photographed plays, its place among them being fixed in the summing up. George Cukor gave it masterly direction, Garbo's performance is her greatest, and Robert Taylor pleased me mightily as Armand; one of Metro's finest productions. *Born to Dance*: An elaborate dance-musical of highest merit; fine direction by Roy del Ruth; beautiful production. Two of Metro's smaller pictures deserve recognition for their human qualities, *The Devil is a Sissy* (Van Dyke) and *The Voice of Bugle Ann*, an appealing little picture directed by Richard Thorpe.

#### PARAMOUNT

**S**EVENTEEN reviewed. Production activities at the Paramount studio were disturbed during the year by the company's reorganization, Adolph Zukor and William Le Baron having their hands full in getting things straightened out and restoring the morale of the studio to the point of efficient functioning. Of the seventeen pictures I saw few which rate serious consideration as among the year's best. Two of the bigger ones, *Texas Rangers*, (King Vidor), and *The Plainsman*, (C. B. de Mille) are imposing productions, entertaining and of historical significance. *Go West, Young Man*, (Henry Hathaway) is the best Mae West to date, excellent entertainment. Edward Ludwig, Robert Florey and Charles Barton contributed ably directed smaller productions on the Paramount program.

#### R.K.O.-RADIO

**T**WELVE reviewed. Taking them in order, *Follow the Fleet*: Excellently directed by Mark Sandrich, this Astaire-Rogers offering is the best of their series; Irving Berlin's music, the stars' dancing, elaborate production and strong cast; it rates high among the year's entries in its class. *A Woman Rebels*, also directed by Mark Sandrich, is an excellent job marred only by some annoying extraneous comedy. *Winterset*, (Alfred Santell): A stage play coming to the screen as one of the most powerful

dramas ever photographed; outstanding demonstration of the screen's ability to outclass the stage in the presentation of a play; easily among the year's finest offerings.

#### TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX

**F**IFTEEN reviewed. A program more imposing by its bulk than by the quality of entertainment it provides. To me its outstanding picture is *Under Two Flags*, directed by Frank Lloyd and starring three of my great favorites, Ronald Colman, Claudette Colbert and Victor McLaglen. A vigorous drama, rich in scenic attractiveness. *To Mary With Love*: A beautiful picture, warmly human, well mounted and acted, great direction by John Cromwell. *Girls' Dormitory*: Irving Cummings' contribution to the important pictures of the company, introduced Simone Simon who registered strongly. *Ladies in Love*: E. H. Griffith's direction responsible for one of the year's best dramas; Janet Gaynor's best picture since dawn of talkies; pictorially glamorous and without weak spots, but appealing more to the intellect than to the emotions. *Banjo on My Knee*: In every way an outstanding picture, directed by John Cromwell

#### UNITED ARTISTS RELEASES

**E**LEVEN reviewed. William Wyler is the year's most sensational directorial discovery. To his credit are *These Three*, *Dodsworth*, and (in collaboration with Howard Hawks) *Come and Get It*, three important productions made by Samuel Goldwyn. *These Three* and *Dodsworth* are engrossing social dramas made from plays, but not ranking as photographed plays in my classification as *Winterset*, *Camille*, and *Petrified Forest* do. To me the Goldwyn productions suggest motion pictures more strongly than the other three, a personal idiosyncrasy I might find difficult to explain if I made the attempt. *These Three* is the most arresting Goldwyn picture by reason of two astonishing performances by children; but *Dodsworth* is a powerful domestic drama. *Come and Get It* is a virile, robust drama, admirably produced. *Little Lord Fauntleroy*: Classic hokum presented splendidly by Selznick-International, directed by John Cromwell and coming to the screen as an appealing human document.

Mary Pickford and Jesse Lasky gave the screen the best grand opera-star picture of the year in *Gay Desperado*, Nino Martini, star; Rouben Mamoulian, director. It has the virtue of giving each of the superbly sung vocal numbers a legitimate place in the story pattern; highly entertaining throughout. *The Ghost Goes West* (London Films): To me, the cleverest comedy conception of the year, wisely directed by René Clair, well acted, well produced. Hard to compare with *My Man Godfrey*, for instance, as they are equally funny but reflect different brands of humor. By virtue of the impossible premise of the English picture I feel Clair is entitled to first honors for sustaining our interest in it.

#### UNIVERSAL

**E**LEVEN reviewed. Universal labored under the handicap of having to keep going while its veteran admiral was being piped over the side and his successor was getting acquainted with his new command. Early in the year the old management gave us *Magnificent Obsession* (John

Stahl) which I did not like and which I said would not have popular appeal. It was one of the greatest box-office successes of the year, which pleases me greatly for I would rather be wrong than right when I predict failure for a picture. *Next Time We Love*, produced by Paul Kohner, directed by E. H. Griffith, was one of the most appealing love stories of 1936. Margaret Sullavan gave a beautiful performance and James Stewart's role was, I believe, the first big one he had in pictures. He scored a triumph. *Show Boat* (James Whale): Would be an outstanding musical in any season; a really important picture.

Universal production slowed up for a time while the new management was being welded by Charles R. Rogers into a smoothly functioning organization. The first picture of distinctive merit to come from it was the hilarious *My Man Godfrey*, which revealed to us a new Carole Lombard and gave Gregory La Cava an opportunity to demonstrate what a brilliant comedy director he is. The picture with which Universal closed the year was *Three Smart Girls*, one of the really fine ones to the credit of 1936. It introduced a new director in the person of Henry Koster and a new star of first magnitude in the person of Deanna Durbin, a child with a great singing voice.

#### WARNER BROTHERS

**T**WENTY-FIVE reviewed. During the first six months of the year Warners led all the rest in the number of outstanding pictures produced. *Petrified Forest* (Archie Mayo), *Captain Blood*, (Michael Curtiz), *Anthony Adverse* (Mervyn LeRoy), *The Green Pastures* (Marc Connelly and William Keighley), *White Angel* (William Dieterle) made an imposing quintette. For the second half of the year the product held its own with that of the other studios, the high spots being *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (Michael Curtiz), a stirring drama, and *Gold Diggers of 1937* (Lloyd Bacon), a musical-spectacle. All these pictures made such an impression that they still will be fresh in the minds of SPECTATOR readers, and I need give them no further mention.

#### PICKING THE WINNERS

**F**OR reasons given at the beginning of this review of reviews, the SPECTATOR refuses to attempt the impossible and name the best picture of the year. However, it is possible to name what I consider to be the best in each of the classifications into which the year's product can be divided.

*The Great Ziegfeld*, stands alone as the greatest merging of music, story and spectacle.

*San Francisco*, is the year's best dramatic thrill woven into an engrossing human story.

*Captain Blood*, the best sea picture.

*The White Angel*, the best biographical picture.

*The Charge of the Light Brigade*, the greatest military drama.

*Petrified Forest*, *Winterset*, and *Camille* have equal merit as photographed plays, each having realized all the possibilities of its story material.

*Nine Days a Queen*, the most meritorious costume picture.

*Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, has no competition as a whimsical comedy with a basically human theme.

*The Ghost Goes West*, the best fantastic comedy, with *My Man Godfrey* sharing almost equal honors for farcical conception and expert development. *Theodora Goes Wild* a close third.

*Rose Marie*, the best screen presentation of musical. *Show Boat* not far behind.

*The Gay Desperado*, the best picture exploiting a grand opera singer.

*Follow the Fleet* and *Gold Digger of 1937* my personal preferences in the way of musical pictures.

A first choice can not be made in the social drama class. *To Mary, With Love*; *These Three*, *Dodsworth*, *Next Time We Love*, appeal to me as having equal merit.

*Banjo on My Knee*, the best American folk story.

*The Green Pastures*, notable production which offers no basis of comparison with others.

*Three Smart Girls* and *The Devil Is a Sissy*, the best pictures featuring juvenile players.

*In His Steps* (Grand National, B. F. Zeidman producer, Karl Brown, director) the best small picture of the year to come from an independent producer.

#### DIRECTION

**T**HERE is one special award I would like to make. Directors of big pictures in the big studios are given every facility in assisting them to do good work, the most talented writers, practically unlimited budgets, ample shooting schedules and notable casts. Directors of class B productions enjoy no such advantages. Everything is limited, even their freedom to make demands. They must take what they can get and make the most of it. When under such conditions a director turns out a perfect job, I believe he is entitled to greater praise than the big fellow who is unhampered in his work. Basing the decision on that theory, I would award the prize for the best direction of the year to Frank McDonald for his direction of *Smart Blonde*, one of Warner Brothers' little class B pictures. And to Karl Brown, for his direction of *In His Steps*, I would award second prize.

#### BY ALLAN HERSHOLT

**A**RRIVED has the time when, with rather frequent occurrence, one is apt to find himself observing some reviewer's selection of the past season's most notable film productions. Compiling such a list in the proper manner is a difficult task which requires a good deal of time and thought, and the final month of each of the past four years has found me doing so. Upon appearing in print, none of my lists, so far as I know, has met with unanimous approval. Such a selection is nothing more than an expression of personal taste, the chosen pictures being merely those that possess in the greatest measure the qualities which the compiler's taste demands in screen entertainment. I do not, nor should anyone who makes a "best" list, maintain that the films selected are the finest to emerge from the studios during the year, but I offer them as those which have given me the most satisfaction.

The screen presentations which interest me to the greatest extent are those providing the most worthy examples

of the cinema as an art. To qualify for a place among my favorites, a picture must contain notable direction. That being to me the element of chief importance, the productions which please me the most are those that display the greatest directorial skill, and no picture makes the grade unless its director has recognized to some degree that the screen is a visual art. I next take into consideration the script, then the story itself—acting, photography and the other elements following.

**I** DO not judge pictures from a business standpoint, from which, of course, the best picture is the one which has achieved the greatest commercial success. Among those I have chosen this year is one which may prove to be a failure at the box-office. It has a place among the selected because of its direction and scripting; because to my taste it is one of the finest transferences of a modern dramatic stage play to the screen we have had since the arrival of sound-cinema; because it presents outstanding examples of screen art. That picture is Radio's *Winterset*, which, in its original form, is not entirely satisfying, but which, upon celluloid, has been made memorably superb by Alfred Santell, director, and Anthony Veiller, scenarist.

It has moments of cinematic brilliance, important moments that, without the aid of dialogue, advance its narrative. Which, of course, is true cinema, something unfortunately given us too infrequently, and particularly in filmized stage works. As a play, *Winterset* talks almost continuously; in screen form, it employs dialogue in a manner with which the most ardent student of the motion picture has no reason to find fault. It is essentially a talkie, a story that must rely mainly upon spoken words in its telling, but it combines dialogue so well with notable cinema that the offering must be acclaimed an outstanding lesson in the proper picturizing of such a play, an enterprise of much value to Hollywood as a study. Noteworthy is the development of dramatic moods by *splendid use of camera* and lighting.

**N**O director in Hollywood could have accomplished finer results than George Cukor has in the filming of Metro's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Camille*, into both of which he has breathed warmth, humanness and charm to a degree heretofore not found in either by this writer. Each offers extraordinarily skilful story-telling and further strengthens the conviction given me by previous Cukor efforts that in the handling of characterization, dialogue-delivery, action, delicate romance and pictorial composition, he is a director with very few peers. A stage director not long ago, he has yet to ignore the fact that the camera is of much importance in the unfolding of a story upon celluloid. Praise is warranted by Cukor for the magnificent portrayals of Greta Garbo, as *Camille*, and Norma Shearer, as *Juliet*, both satisfying me far and away more than any they previously have given. For visual beauty, I have not seen either *Romeo* or *Camille* surpassed and rarely equalled. The former is a technical masterpiece, its settings and photography of tremendous merit.

David Selznick's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, told in delightfully, appropriately simple fashion and mounted ex-

quisitely, is one of the two cinematic novel translations during the year that have satisfied me considerably more than any of the numerous others. An unusually notable achievement of John Cromwell's directorial career, it derives much strength from the genuine perception of screen art that is greatly in evidence. Cromwell and Hugh Walpole, author of the script, have demonstrated wisdom in permitting as many scenes of value to the plot as possible to be recorded principally by the camera. Each of the production's elements, blended to perfection, has attained the sort of success that even the most captious observer could not fail to approve.

**T**HE other notable literary translation to which I have referred is *Anthony Adverse*, and the screen has given us no finer piece of craftsmanship, no more human and compelling document than this. When Sheridan Gibney fell heir to the task of creating a screen play that would do justice to the Hervey Allen book, he received what seems to me the most difficult assignment ever given a film writer, and the success achieved is unsurpassable. Gibney and Mervyn LeRoy, director, head the list of this tremendously successful production's heroes. In none of its departments has it missed greatness.

The Warner Brothers-First National organization has contributed largely toward making the past season one of brilliance, in fact more so, judging from my selected films, than has any other studio in Hollywood. In addition to *Adverse*, from this lot have come *Story of Louis Pasteur* and *Green Pastures*, two of the pictures that have given me satisfaction to such an extent that I include them in my collection of all-time favorites. *Pasteur* contains several scenes of pure motion picture, not a small amount of its thematically important moments coming to us in silence. William Dieterle, having time and again given evidence of being gifted with a thorough knowledge of the screen, merits great commendation upon his treatment of *Pasteur*, in which, filmed from a beautifully-executed script, each scene is in perfect harmony with its mood and in which dramatic moods are developed with amazing skill by manipulation of light and shade.

**G**REEN PASTURES is the production which has enchanted me more than any other during the year. Rich in humanness, color, charm, warmth, extraordinary from a technical standpoint, this magnificent transference of the highly original stage success shines forth as a triumph for William Keighley, a triumph for his associate in direction, Marc Connelly, and for all of the others involved in its production. In every way, the film is more to my liking than its original form, and it seems to me worthy of a prominent place among the industry's finest examples of the talking motion picture.

Sonya Levien and Charles Blake are credited with writing the original screen play that has afforded me greater satisfaction than any other of the year, *The Country Doctor*. A warmly human film, its story rich in realism, its humor hitting great heights of success, its direction (Henry King) and portrayals inspired, its production in every way commendable, this Twentieth Century-Fox



offering owns the sequence that, from the standpoint of entertainment, has met with my approval more than any I have seen during the year. It is that superbly conceived and executed sequence dealing with the birth of the Quintuplets. Leaning not infrequently upon the camera as a plot-revealing aid, *Country Doctor* seems to me destined to be among the pictures that will be remembered as one of the finest original creations of the industry.

**U**NIVERSAL'S *Show Boat* is present here because I have found it more pleasing than any picturization of a stage operetta during the year, and, incidentally, I have viewed it upon three different occasions. Directorially and in every way it is a splendid achievement, and in it James Whale proves himself a master craftsman, a director with a genuine understanding of the medium in which he works, a director with a soul. *Show Boat* is a visual delight, possessing a wealth of pictorial impressiveness, camera work and art direction of magnificence. It is a fine example of intelligent recording, not only in music but in dialogue as well, a model of perfection in the filming of an operetta.

Metro's *Great Ziegfeld*, so far as pictorial sweep, spectacle and quantity of arresting entertainment are concerned, rates number one of the season with me. A technically extraordinary accomplishment, splendidly directed, written, acted and photographed, it recognizes with frequency and with huge success the power that lies within the camera. Director Robert Leonard has done much toward making of this an unforgettable offering, a moving, living thing in addition to an outstanding exhibition of screen mechanics.

Included in my group of all-time pet films is each of the Frank Capra - Robert Riskin efforts. Their *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* is, as I wrote in the SPECTATOR'S July Fourth issue, what we have come to expect from the industry's ace writer-director team: a masterpiece of humanness and humor. Told with a generous amount of thoroughly fine dialogue and given a good deal of strength by an intelligently-employed camera, it stands as a superb example of the flawless talking motion picture.

**E**UGENE O'NEILL'S *Ah, Wilderness!*, produced by Metro, has made its cinematic appearance not merely as a photographed stage play like most theatrical pieces of its sort do, but as the possessor of true cinema to a notable degree, to the greatest extent permitted by its narrative, one that demands talk as its chief story-teller. In the transferring onto celluloid, this enjoyable, unimportant, far-from-great play was converted into a film of greatness, made so mainly by a director whose productions never yet have failed to display his realization that the screen is a visual art. *Ah, Wilderness!* expectedly will be referred to for years as a monument to the directorial genius of Clarence Brown.

Had I seen *Song of China*, which Mr. Beaton considers an extraordinary example of the art of the screen, the only true motion picture he has viewed in the last five years, it probably would have been included among those I have selected. In fact, I feel sure it would, and I

truly regret missing it. Of necessity, I have limited my selection of pictures to those manufactured in this country.

**I**T has been an unusually fine year, cinematically speaking. Aside from the already-mentioned productions, we have been treated to many of high distinction, some of which, having met with my approval to a degree slightly less than those named as my favorites, warrant honorable mention: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Captain Blood*, *Charge of the Light Brigade*, *Petrified Forest*, each from Warners; *Lloyd's of London*, *Under Two Flags*, *The Prisoner of Shark Island*, *The Road to Glory*, each from Twentieth Century-Fox; *Dodsworth*, *These Three*, *Come and Get It*, each from Goldwyn; *Modern Times*, from Chaplin; *San Francisco*, from M.-G.-M.; and *My Man Godfrey*, from Universal.

It, too, has been a season of many distinguished portrayals. Particularly noteworthy are those given by Paul Muni in *Pasteur*, Norma Shearer in *Romeo and Juliet*, Jean (fine as a father, too!) Hersholt in *Sins of Man*, Mickey Rooney in *Devil Is a Sissy*, Greta Garbo in *Camille*, Charles Chaplin in *Modern Times*, Carole Lombard and William Powell in *My Man Godfrey*, Luise Rainer in *Great Ziegfeld*, Walter Huston in *Dodsworth*, Rex Ingram in *Green Pastures*, Spencer Tracy in *San Francisco*, Eric Linden in *Ah, Wilderness!*, Lionel Barrymore in *Gorgeous Hussy*, Gladys George in *Valiant is the Word for Carrie*, Warner Baxter in *Prisoner of Shark Island*, C. Aubrey Smith in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Jack Oakie in *Texas Rangers* and Isabel Jewell in *Ceiling Zero*.

### BY PAUL JACOBS

**B**EFORE I add my little list to the huge year-end pile of "best picture for 1936", I should like to confess that I, along with the rest of you, realize that, in truth, there can be no such thing as a "best" picture. Films can be judged, of course, in terms of cino-dramatic law; but the possible types of entertainment are many, and each has its own criterion, against which another type may not honestly be compared. So the best I have been able to do is to select a representative from each of the many fields.

Taking the groups in alphabetical order, my choice for this year's best biography is *Rhodes, Empire Builder*. It is very seldom that a biography is filmically successful, because the exigencies of life do not lend themselves readily to dramatic form; and few producers are capable of the discriminate selection necessary to achieve a unified story, while preserving the biographical facts. *Rhodes*, from either the angle of drama or fact, is unassailable.

**A**LSO biographical, but chosen for its beauty, is *The Great Ziegfeld*. Embodying the total of qualities necessary for esthetic, dramatic, psychologic, and biographic interest, *The Great Ziegfeld* sets a new standard.

In the realm of comedy there are several distinct approaches, each developing its own brand of humor. First is *The Ghost Goes West*, a phantasy, depending upon a carefully created and sustained mood for the reality illusion necessary for validation of its humor. In contrast,

is the thematic comedy, *Mr. Deeds Goes To Town*; in this spritely affair, the deep undercurrent of down-to-earth truth furnishes the pegs upon which the contrasting humor is hung. And finally, *My Man Godfrey*, a satirical comedy whose strength is in its filmic rhythm.

As for costume, *Captain Blood*, in my opinion, exemplifies the romantic possibilities that lie ready at hand in period pictures, provided the dramatic laws are not forgotten in the glamor of pretty wigs, as is usually the case.

**F**OR the historical, *The Texas Rangers* packs the total of interest that could be squeezed from a combination of facts and action. More films of this type would have an intensely educational effect. A series, for example, on American history would prove of boundless satisfaction in the school-rooms. The same can be said of *Louis Pasteur*, the best American-made historical biography.

Under the heading of mood, comes *Green Pastures*. Strictly, this film is an intensification of mood or an atmosphere picture; since it depends upon the aura of the movement to carry it over the barrier of the audience's subconscious intellectual rebuff.

Technically, of course, *Things To Come* is in a class by itself. A phantasy, it covers the intellectually unacceptable metamorphosis of time by an ingenious camera. Since we see it, we for the moment accept it.

**F**INALLY, my choice for theme, *These Three*. It carries a terrific heart punch not soon forgotten, because the entire story movement is woven of the very threads of life. Exaggerated, theme is known as "hokum". In intelligent doses it is eternal box-office.

It is significant that three of these pictures are British. A short time ago no one could honestly rate any English film as better than fair. The foreign films are beginning to scrawl the handwriting on the wall.

In extenuation for my quite arguable choices, I should like to add that there are many fine films I have not seen. *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo And Juliet* as examples. Doubtless I might make many erasures had I a more comprehensive list from which to choose. *Mutiny On The Bounty* would have been mentioned, had it not been a last year release that came to most houses early in 1936.

**DAVID MILLER**

DIRECTOR

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

## Some Late Previews

### Rembrandt Brought to Life

REMBRANDT, a London film production released through United Artists. Director, Alexander Korda; assistant, Geoffrey Boothby; production manager, David Cunynghame; camera, Georges Perinal; art director, Vincent Korda; costumes, John Armstrong; scripts, Carl Zuckmayer; stills, Edward Woods. Cast: Charles Laughton, Gertrude Lawrence, Elsa Lanchester, Edward Chapman, John Bryning, Richard Gofe, Meinhart Maur, Walter Hudd, John Clements.

**E**VEN superlatives seem poor, weak things with which to pay tribute to this Korda-Laughton film. The product of the combination when it gave the screen *The Private Lives of Henry VIII* prepared us for a cinematic treat when it announced *Rembrandt*, but what appears on the screen far excels anything the most optimistic imagination could encompass. The picture is so good that it is astonishing. There is no story—just some incidents in the life of a painter, about half a dozen, all told, stretching over his adult lifetime and giving us, as a last glimpse, a lonely old man, poverty stricken, hungry, friendless, spending food money for paint even though there was no one left for him to paint. The women he loved, and whom he loved to paint, were dead; scores of self-portraits were in existence—slim stuff, this, out of which to make a motion picture.

As a matter of fact, it is not the stuff out of which Korda made his picture. Just as Rembrandt took people of no interest to us and recreated them with his art to make us take an interest in them, so did Korda take the rather dull life of the painter and transform it by his art into a biography so beautiful that it will command the attention of the world. I have written often that it is the art of the screen which makes motion pictures entertaining, not the material it uses, and in this Korda creation we find the theory presented as a fact. Laughton's performance is a greater portrait of a man than even Rembrandt ever painted, an extraordinary, inspired characterization, the greatest the screen has given us. Laughton does not act the part; he feels it; he *is* Rembrandt, an illusion made realistic by his uncanny resemblance to the great painter.

**K**ORDA'S direction, too, is inspired. His people are persons who converse in conversational tones, not actors who read lines; people who serve as a background for the great person who occupies the center of the canvas. And in all the history of the screen there has been no comparable instance of such brilliant sustaining of a mood. The grouping of characters and the photographic treatment of scenes adhere closely to the technique of the painter and bring to our delighted eyes scores of matchless Rembrandt compositions as worthy examples of camera art as the painter's are of the art he dignified. It is the mood which keeps alive our interest in the scattered incidents in the painter's life, which makes the picture engrossing and earns our warm sympathy for its leading character.

Korda does not build to climaxes, does not strive for dramatic effect. The superbly written screen play provides Laughton with several long speeches which he reads quietly, without emphasis, but which grip us with the in-

tensity of their feeling. One is a beautiful tribute to his wife and in its direction there is a lesson for Hollywood directors. Korda does not keep his camera on the speaker. The importance of screen dialogue, as the SPECTATOR consistently has maintained, is its effect on the person addressed, not the facial movements of the speaker. As Laughton speaks, the camera moves about the room, picking up groups of his listeners, showing them drinking in his words and enabling the camera to bring to us a series of Rembrandt compositions with lights and shades which might have been his, and photographed with extraordinary artistic skill. All the performances in the picture are in a mood to match its visual appeal.

*Rembrandt* is at the Four Star Theatre. If Hollywood and Los Angeles are capable of appreciating spoken picture art at the highest point yet attained, the production should run for months. Occasionally we are blessed with a picture made abroad that it is Hollywood's duty to see. *Rembrandt* is such a picture.

## Henie, Ritz, Minevitch & Co.

ONE IN A MILLION, Twentieth Century-Fox production. Directed by Sidney Lanfield; associate producer, Raymond Griffith; story and screen play by Leonard Praskins and Mark Kelly; music and lyrics, ONE IN A MILLION, WHO'S AFRAID OF LOVE?, THE MOONLIT WALTZ, WE'RE BACK IN CIRCULATION AGAIN, by Lew Pollack and Sidney D. Mitchell; skating ensembles staged by Jack Haskell; photography, Edward Cronjager, A.S.C.; art direction, Mark-Lee Kirk; set decorations by Thomas Little; assistant director, William Forsyth; film editor, Robert Simpson; costumes, Royer; sound, Arthur von Kirbach and Roger Heman; musical direction, Louis Silvers. Cast: Sonja Henie; Adolphe Menjou, Don Ameche, Ned Sparks, Jean Hersholt, Themselves, Arline Judge, Borrah Minevitch, Dixie Dunbar, Leah Ray, Shirley Deane, Montagu Love, Albert Conti, Julius Tannen.

SONJA HENIE'S skating, the Ritz brothers' comedy and the harmonica playing of Borrah Minevitch—each with enough merit to carry the weight of a whole production—are combined in *One in a Million* to make it a noteworthy production that will be a tough mark for the other studios to shoot at during the rather long stretch of this year there still is left. Sonja's skating is good fodder for the camera which can advance and retreat to give us close scenes and others of wider perspective until we feel we would be no better off if we were seeing her in person. Her exemplification of the poetry of motion becomes almost poignant in its appeal to the emotions. I once wrote that I estimate the emotional value of screen scenes by the degree in which they bring a lump to my throat and the length of time they keep it there. All the time Sonja was skating the lump made its presence known.

But the skating itself was not solely responsible for the lump. Sonja was presented to us in a manner effective in enlisting our interest in her and creating in us a desire to see her make good—her charming personality was registered before she appeared on the ice. Some months ago I saw in one of the big pictures a young man give a remarkably skilful exhibition of dancing. The few glimpses of him prior to his dancing turn revealed a negative personality, that he was an uninteresting, colorless person who, as an individual, did not interest me, consequently his dancing appealed to me only as a cold exposition of

graceful agility. Fred Astaire's dancing, on the other hand, prompts my emotional response. His personality pleases me, enlists my sympathetic interest in anything he does; he is my friend doing things to entertain me, and my emotions respond readily to any appeal made to them.

APPARENTLY, the producers of *One in a Million* realized the importance of presenting Sonja Henie as a person before presenting her as a skater. In her first scenes we see her as a charming girl, a sweet youngster who we desire to see make good in anything she attempts. She is our friend before she appears on the ice, not a professional skater giving an impersonal exhibition of the art she has mastered. When she competes for the Olympic prize, our hopes are for her to carry off the honors; anxiously we watch each of her exquisitely graceful strides, and when she, our friend more than a competitor, wins

OWEN MARX

*Film Editor*

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METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

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the award, we feel like standing up and cheering. Thus it is that personality is a greater screen asset than performing technique; it explains why Shirley Temple is a greater box-office favorite than Katharine Hepburn, why Gary Cooper has a better box-office rating than Leslie Howard.

It is their personalities that put over the Ritz brothers. They demonstrate in *One in a Million* that they could carry the whole responsibility of a production. There must be some intellectual appeal in even the crazy sort of comedy of which they are such complete masters. They are clever, and cleverness in any line is appreciated by an audience. There is a subtle quality in even their most boisterous antics that is lacking in the performances of the Marx brothers. Given a few more pictures in which to consolidate their following, the Ritz trio will outdistance the Marx trio in box-office draw.

**BEST WISHES**  
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**T**HE lowly mouth organ has been dignified only to the extent of becoming called harmonica, but has not risen far above its classification as a low-brow not even on bowing acquaintance with other musical instruments. Its social ostracism must be due solely to its cheapness and ease of transport—to the fact of its being played byurchins on street corners and in other undignified settings—for certainly no one, after hearing Minevitch and his oddly assorted group play it, can challenge its right to recognition as a musical instrument of dignity, fully able to do justice to the most dignified compositions. The most prolonged burst of applause with which the large and friendly preview audience, gathered as guests of the producers, accorded any feature of *One in a Million* was that which followed the conclusion of the most ambitious harmonica offering. What we need in this country is an organization that will devote itself to the task of raising the social status of the mouth organ and gaining recognition for Borrah Minevitch as its greatest living virtuoso.

**R**AYMOND GRIFFITH, producer of *One in a Million*, has seen to it that the story takes aboard naturally in its forward progress each of the skating, musical, and comedy interludes, story construction which succeeds pretty well in keeping our interest in it continuous. This is true of the skating numbers, all of them being given story significance. For the first time I noticed the name of Mark Kelly on the screen as collaborator in writing the screen story. Mark's distinguished career as a sporting editor should be of value to picture producers who intend filming stories with sport angles.

In general, Sidney Lanfield's direction is creditable, but it is marred by the manner in which he induced Adolphe Menjou to read his lines. He fairly yells them, maintaining the loud pitch so consistently that his voice finally got me. At first I thought the loud talking was for the purpose of characterizing Adolphe as a blow-hard, but when alone with his wife in their bedroom, he shouted

**BEST WISHES**  
**NIGEL BRUCE**

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just as loudly his plan for cheating the landlord out of his board bill, I saw that it merely was bad direction. The landlord was played splendidly by Jean Hersholt. Don Ameche, Arline Judge, Dixie Dunbar and Montagu Love also give good performances. Lew Pollack and Sidney Mitchell are responsible for some tuneful, lively and clever songs away above the standard of similar numbers usually inserted in pictures of the sort.

### Does Not Realize Possibilities

**GOD'S COUNTRY AND THE WOMAN**, Warners production and release. Hal B. Wallis, executive producer; Lou Edelman, associate producer; directed by William Keighley; screen play by Norman Reilly Raine; from story by Peter Milne and Charles Belden; based on novel by James Oliver Curwood; assistant director, Chuck Hansen; technicolor director, Natalie Kalmus; photographed by Tony Gaudio; technicolor photographic adviser, William V. Skall; associate cameramen, Allen Davey and Wilfred M. Cline; film editor, Jack Killifer; art director, Carl Jules Weyl; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; music by Max Steiner. Cast: George Brent, Beverly Roberts, Barton MacLane, Robert Barrat, Alan Hale, Joseph King, El Brendel, Joseph Crehan, Addison Richards, Roscoe Ates, Billy Bevan, Bert Roach, Vic Potel, Mary Treen, Herbert Rawlinson, Harry Hayden, Pat Moriarity, Max Wagner, Susan Fleming. Running time, 90 minutes.

**T**O offset a vigorous, picturesque background photographed in subdued Technicolor, we have here a story that is shouted at us and a romance made as disagreeable as possible. George Brent is one of the most agreeable leading men we have, a robust he-man who knows how to act. He is introduced to us in this picture as the cutest devil-of-a-fellow, the greatest cut-up one would expect to find outside a kindergarten class. The way he chases girls in Europe, the thousands of dollars he spends—well, you'd just die laughing! And the way he insults everyone is too devastating! When he meets Beverly Roberts he insults her, and thereafter we are treated to a series of snarls from both sides of the romance.

The story is a virile one dealing with the rivalry of two British Columbia lumbering firms. It brings to us beautifully photographed scenes of woodsmen felling trees, logs thundering down chutes and diving into water, the dyna-

miting of a log jam and many other activities incidental to the lumbering business. The romance is incidental to its physical aspects and should have run through the story as a pleasant, subdued note in the dynamic industrial symphony of sight and sound. Instead, it is a constant irritation by virtue of the ridiculous characterizations wished on poor Brent and the unoffending Beverly and which are made more aggravating by the excellent manner in which they play the parts assigned to them.

**G**EORGE arrives at the scene of operations when his plane runs out of gas and he makes a forced landing on an inlet near the camp of the lumber firm at war with his. That is the last we hear of the plane. Apparently it is there yet. Another absurdity is the fact of his virtual imprisonment in the confines of the camp where he is compelled to work for his board at the hardest jobs that can be found for him. Seemingly it never occurred to anyone that he could send for gasoline and fly out.

**LILLIE HAYWARD**

Writing for

**Warner Brothers**

COMPLIMENTS OF

THE SEASON

**DIXIE DUNBAR**

Greetings

**NAT PERRIN**

**R. K. O.**

**JOHN J. HUGHES**

Art Director

**Warner Brothers-First National**

COMPLIMENTS OF THE SEASON

TO

**WELFORD BEATON**

AND

**THE HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR**

**WILLIAM SISTROM**

Fundamentally the story is a good one but it is spoiled in the telling. Most of the dialogue is shouted and no effort is made to spare the ears of the audience. When nothing else is at hand to produce noise, the musical score fills the void with fortissimo passages which shake the rafters. Robert Barrat, a big executive, makes one nervous by his display of nervousness and his loud dialogue; El Brendel and Roscoe Ates provide comedy unrelated to what is going on, the distractions, in fact, being so numerous that it is impossible for the audience to keep its attention centered on the thread of the story. And *God's Country and the Woman* could have been made an outstanding attraction by the application of a little more understanding of the possibilities of the story.

**RAYMOND HATTON**

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**FREDERICK Y. SMITH**

FILM EDITOR  
METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

## Doing Right by Shirley

**STOWAWAY**, 20th Century-Fox. Associate producers, Earl Carroll and Harold Wilson; direction, William A. Seiter; story, Sam Engel; screen play, William Conselman, Arthur Sheekman and Nat Perrin; photography, Arthur Miller; musical direction, Louis Silvers; film editor, Lloyd Nosler; assistant director, Earl Haley. Cast: Shirley Temple, Robert Young, Alice Faye, Eugene Pallette, Helen Westley, Arthur Treacher, Alan Lane, J. Edward Bromberg, Astrid Allwyn, Robert Greig, Jayne Regan, Julius Tannen, Willie Fung, Philip Ahn, Paul McVey, Helen Jerome Eddy, William Stack, Honorable Wu.

**WHEN** I reviewed *Dimples* in the SPECTATOR of October 10 last, I complained that Century was not doing right by its little box-office prize, that she had become merely a performer of parlor tricks in pictures that gave her no opportunities to show what a brilliant trouper she is. As *Stowaway* was in the making at that time, I cannot claim my beefing in any way influenced those making it, so we may accept the fact of her latest picture's being the best Shirley has had since *Now and Forever*, made in 1934, as being Century's realization that something had to be done to bolster her waning box-office strength, and put down my remarks merely as a case of parallel thinking. Shirley's talents have been misused sadly by her producers. Century never regarded her for what she is, the screen's greatest actress; it looked upon her only as a hooper and crooner, both of which she does well because, being a good actress, she can perform acceptably anything given her to do.

Shirley is a great actress because she at all times is in perfect control of her emotions; and that is all screen acting is. The camera permits us to look closely into the eyes of a screen player and what we see there is the performance. The eyes give dialogue its meaning and are more eloquent than any words can be. Shirley's eyes are the most eloquent in pictures. She can utter just a dismayed, "Oh!" and her eyes give it meaning; they reveal to us just what she is thinking. In her new picture she is separated from her friends to be taken to an orphans' home. First you can see pain come to her eyes; then the brave effort to keep back the tears, the few drops that squeeze out, the struggle to keep from breaking down. It is pure cinema. Shakespeare himself could not have writ-

COMPLIMENTS OF

THE SEASON

**DAN TOTHEROH**

WARNER BROTHERS

ten dialogue as poignant. But on the screen today the eyes do not have it. Scenarists write emotions and the players recite them.

**S**HIRLEY comes into her own again in *Stowaway*. An excellent screen play was written for her; she is given no tricks to play, is permitted to run the full gamut of emotions, and the result is a scintillating performance that will delight you if the steady dose of talkies has not blunted your capacity for recognizing real cinema when it is presented to you. A delightful scene is that in a court room which she shares with Edward Bromberg, an experienced actor who brilliantly holds up his end of it. The little actress sings two songs, one a pretty lullaby which loses much of its effectiveness by some silly comedy which accompanies it. Robert Young and Arthur Treacher tuck her in bed, and as neither knows a lullaby, Shirley sings one and both men go to sleep, thereby ruining the mood of the scene. Her other song unfortunately comes after the story is ended.

But *Stowaway* is a picture you should see, even though Young, the leading man, is first characterized as being proud of his capacity for absorbing strong drink. I never will be able to understand by what process of reasoning producers arrive at the conviction that drunkenness is entertaining. In a Shirley Temple picture it is a display of rotten taste, and in no other picture is it anything but an affront to people with decent instincts. On the whole, however, Young's performance pleased me more than any other he has given us. Alice Faye is delightful, Helen Westley artistically shrewish, Robert Greig excellent as he always is, and, thank heaven, he does not play a butler. Eugene Pallette plays a massive drunk with skill. William Seiter's direction is outstanding. The story material gave him possibilities which he realizes to the full. And

Century provided a production of an imposing nature, William Darling's sets permitting Arthur Miller's camera to bring us scenes of photographic beauty.

## Performs Remarkable Feats

**THAT GIRL FROM PARIS**, Radio picture and release. A Pandro S. Berman production. Directed by Leigh Jason; screen play by P. J. Wolfson and Dorothy Yost; adaptation by Joseph A. Fields; based on a story by Jane Murfin, and suggested by story in Young's magazine by J. Carey Wonderly; music by Arthur Schwartz; lyrics by Edward Heyman; musical direction by Nathaniel Shilkret; operatic numbers conducted by Andre Kostelanetz; photographed by J. Roy Hunt; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate, Carroll Clark; gowns by Edward Stevenson; set dressing by Darrell Silvera; recorded by Hugh McDowell, Jr.; edited by William Morgan. Cast: Lily Pons, Jack Oakie, Gene Raymond, Herman Bing, Mischa Auer, Frank Jenks, Lucille Ball, Patricia Wilder, Vinton Haworth, Gregory Gaye, Willard Robertson, Rafaela Ottiano, Ferdinand Gottschalk. Running time, 102 minutes.

**D**ECEMBER 7, 1935, issue of the SPECTATOR contained a review of a picture produced by Pandro Berman for RKO. I wrote then, "It would be hard to find a more inefficient job than his *I Dream Too Much*, in which Lily Pons makes her bow to cinema audiences." I did Pan an injustice. He has made it easy to find a more inefficient job, his second Pons picture, *That Girl from Paris* outranking the first in rankness. It is so bad it is hard to believe the fact of its badness even when you are looking at it. Lily Pons stows away on an Atlantic liner, and to avoid capture by the immigration authorities on

Greetings to Welford Beaton

**LEW LANDERS**

R. K. O.

Compliments of the Season

**REEVES (BREEZY) EASON**

Directing for

**Warner Brothers**

**WALTER HUSTON**

**EWING SCOTT**

*Writing and Directing*

for

**George O'Brien**

Happy New Year  
to

**The Spectator**

**MISCHA AUER**

**PAT O'BRIEN**

— AGAIN

**ALBERT LEWIS**

Producing  
for  
R. K. O.

this side, daintily picks up her coat, opens the porthole of her cabin and steps with a splash into New York harbor. A couple of hours later we find her in the bedroom of four comedians composing a jazz orchestra, and then we make the interesting discovery that a free translation of her name might be Pond Lily, for apparently she had floated ashore from the ship without getting wet. Not even a faint wrinkle in one of her garments betrays the fact of her so recent immersion.

The immigration fellows are after her. They watch the building. If they see Lily leaving it, they will grab her and send the four comedians to jail for a long, long time. Lily does not know this. She leaves the building in the middle of the night. The comedians, not waiting to dress, romp after her along the crowded street—why crowded at that hour heaven alone knows—clamorously lead Lily back into the building in order that she will not be seen leaving it, even though she already had left it. Why didn't they let her go, you ask? Because, stupid, they had to pull her back into the story. You see, the situation of the jazz boys was desperate. The law had no evidence pointing to their guilt, and on their side they had only the evidence of the four of them that they had nothing to do with smuggling her into the country, and the evidence of the ship's officers that the boys readily handed her over to them.

**T**HUS you will see that with all the evidence pointing to their innocence, under our laws, as interpreted by Mr. Berman, they could not escape being found guilty. Of course, they might urge in their defense the fact that a girl who can swim ashore with her coat over her arm without getting wet, was quite capable of accomplishing without aid her own smuggling-in, but that would tend merely to strengthen their defense without weakening the fact of their guilt, involved reasoning, I will admit, but I am just back from seeing the picture and am a bit muddled.

As she is a Metropolitan star, we expect the delectable little Lily to sing. And she does, magnificently. When she is hiding in the boys' apartment and even the tip of her nose must not be seen outside it, she and Jack Oakie go out to the roof of the building, and into the still night air she broadcasts with larklike clearness and full volume an ingratiating melody that should have been heard from the Bowery to the Bronx, but which apparently is heard only by Jack above the strains of a symphony orchestra accompaniment he is playing on a guitar. The artistic peak of the picture is reached when Lily sings an aria from *The Barber of Seville* at the Metropolitan Opera House. Here, again, Jack is of inestimable value to the

Season's Greetings  
**HARRY SHERMAN**



esthetic appeal of Lily's art, contributing one of the most delightful touches imaginable. While she is singing, he chews the leaves of his program and shoots the conductor in the neck with wet, gooey wads of paper. I have attended operas in the Metropolitan that might have been made more spirited by such an innovation, and unless Berman has copyrighted this aid to artistic effectiveness, I would suggest to the Metropolitan authorities that they give serious consideration to its adoption as a regular feature of their productions.

Another suggestion I would make is to Robert Ripley. If he will view *That Girl from Paris*, he will find many things, in addition to those I have mentioned, that would fit appropriately only into his Believe-It-Or-Nots. The only thing in the picture that is worse than the intimate scenes is all the rest of it.

## THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS

THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS, RKO-Radio. Directed by John Ford; assisted by Arthur Shields of the Abbey Theatre; associate producers, Cliff Reid and Robert Sisk; screen play by Dudley Nichols; from the play by Sean O'Casey; musical score, Roy Webb; photographed by Joseph August, A. S. C.; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate, Carroll Clark; set Dressing by Darrell Silvera; technical director, George Bernard McNulty; recorded by Hugh McDowell Jr.; assistant director, Eddie Donahue; edited by George Hively. Cast: Barbara Stanwyck, Preston Foster, Barry Fitzgerald, Denis O'Dea, Eileen Crowe, F. J. McCormick, Una O'Connor, Arthur Shields, Moroni Olsen, J. M. Kerrigan, Bonita Granville, Erin O'Brien Moore, Neil Fitzgerald, Robert Homans, Brandon Hurst, Cyril McLaglen, Wesley Barry, D'Arcy Corrigan, Mary Gordon, Doris Lloyd.

*Reviewed by Frederick Stone*

(*Editor's Note:* Inasmuch as Frederick Stone is now in Hollywood, he is substituting this feature for his regular contribution under the *New York Spectacle* heading.)

**A**LTHOUGH it is dated 1937 and will not be released for some time yet, this picture stands very close to the top of my own private selection of the best pictures of 1937. If I were to join the ranks of the self-appointed judges of the best films of the year, I am not at all sure that I would not put it directly at the top of the list, and gaze at it with satisfaction, as though in so doing I had played some part in its proud career.

When I sat down to reviewing *The Plough and the Stars*, I realized that there is not a great deal to be said about it, and that probably the best way to review the film would be to list each of its component parts and opposite each write "Excellent."

That, probably, is about all I should write. There are, nevertheless, a few points which I feel might be brought out to advantage. One is that we have here a

**KATHERINE TURNEY**

*Writing for*

**Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer**

**MARK KELLY**

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Collaboration on Screen Play

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**STARRING SONJA HENIE**

for

**20th Century Fox**

**KURT NEUMANN**

Directed

**RAINBOW ON THE RIVER**



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## GREETINGS

HARRY WARREN

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AL DUBIN

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legitimate play translated to the art of the cinema in a thoroughly logical way. Instead of lifting the dialogue practically in toto out of the play and into the film, Dudley Nichols has employed an artist's talent for selection and sublimation, so that the result is genuine cinema and not crudely borrowed art. The dialogue is reduced to the essentials necessary for the projection to the audience of mood and meaning, with the result, in the first place, that wherever possible the story is told by the camera and the tools of the motion picture are utilized to their fullest advantage, and, in the second place, that when lines are spoken they achieve, through their isolation, a force and a poignancy rarely obtained upon the stage.

AS an example of the latter point I may mention the scene upon the steps of the Clitheroe home, where Nora and the little consumptive girl are sitting. Nora is silent with fears for her soldier husband, and the girl is silent with awe at Nora's grief. She asks a few short, half finished questions about marriage, but there is no dialogue in the fuller sense of the word. Then they fall silent again. Suddenly the girl gets up, starts to go, and says, "I wonder if I'll ever be keepin' a home together for a man." The intelligent, economical use of dialogue here isolated this line, made it stand out against the background of silence as a painting stands out when well hung upon an uncrowded wall, and gave it added overtones of feeling.

Another point which merits especial attention is that this is one of the few pictures I have seen in which rhythm has been consciously introduced. *The Plough and the Stars* makes good use of opportunities for rhythm, and thus becomes a more complete work of cinema art than it would otherwise have been. For instance, short shots of powerful emphasis (the battle scenes) and long shots containing material of less significance (the homely sequences showing the old ladies squabbling in saloons and at home) are combined with other shots of the same material in which the quantitative and qualitative values coincide. Other rhythms are established, such as the effective recurrent beat of the reunion of the lovers, and the recurrence to the minor theme of the consumptive little girl. This picture proves that it is possible to be artistic in the cinema without being "arty," that a film of action can be a visual symphony just as well as a film of pure moods, such as Eisenstein's *Romance Sentimentale*. The use of rhythms, interwoven and recurring, heightens immeasurably the dramatic power of this film.

MANY other notable examples of the excellent direction of this picture might be given. One of them, for instance, is the intelligent handling of the walk in the park of the husband and wife. For the first time the walk in a park of two lovers is not treated as an idyllic, honeyed interlude. It is just about what a meeting in the park of two devoted people would be like in life. There are plenty of others around following their own pursuits without reverence for the couple who cross their path. Even the swans on the lake do not seem particularly to care, and all nature does not conspire to give them a long moment of pastoral bliss.

Another example of intelligent direction that may be picked from many is the treatment of the lighter sequences. Instead of adopting the classical and obvious technique of easing the load of a tragic sequence with totally incongruous and often idiotic comedy relief, John Ford has taken pains to give us scenes which, while light and in themselves comical, do yet express a part of the total tragedy of the theme and are therefore valid sequences in the dramatic whole. We laugh to see the old ladies fighting bitterly, and to see the alcoholic ineffectualness of Fluther, and we are momentarily relieved from the high pitch and tension of the battle, but the very bitterness of the beldames and the ineptness of the voluble Fluther are all symptomatic of the tragic condition of Ireland, and they play an integral part in conveying that tragedy to us.

**A**NOTHER example of fine direction may be noted in the scene showing the barricading and defense of the post office by the insurgents. The camera takes us from one man to another in the line, and we see intimate, human things, hear a few words spoken between an officer and a man, and so absorb the feeling and the temper of the entire body of men. A few short shots of small details establish in our minds all that is necessary to understand the mood and action in every respect. A few small parts reveal the whole. Also, the cast is perfectly rounded. Although several stars play the leads, no one is permitted to stand out from the rest simply because he or she is a name to the public, and as a consequence the cast is kept in balance.

Again, in the matter of suspense the direction is surpassing. The drama mounts slowly, yet unhesitatingly, towards its culmination. There is no going back, no sliding off on tangents, only the one direct ultimate purpose. To sum up: A motion picture is created through the collaboration of many minds and many talents; and when all the minds and talents which combine to make a picture are great ones, working in harmony with one another and thoroughly understanding their medium, then such a fine picture as *The Plough and the Stars* is the result.

**T**HIS film deserves praise not only as a motion picture alone, but also because of the social importance of its theme. It is the first picture which has gone to the very heart of man's great problem, war. The current cry is that war is brought about by abstract groups of politicians, capitalists, munitions makers, and by blood-lust nations. Any high school student will blandly state that economics are the true causes of war. All of this is very probably true; but the fact is that war is waged by men, and if we analyze men at all we must see them, not simply as nations and large groups, but microscopically as the very small social groups and individuals which together make up the larger groups and the nations.

While wars may be fought for economic reasons, yet when these are boiled down to their simplest terms in the individual we discover the primary passions without which war would be impossible. Any conception of war which does not remember the individual fault of the hu-

◆

WILLIAM CLEMENS

WARNER BROTHERS

◆

EDWARD KILLY

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R K O

CHARLES BARTON



PARAMOUNT STUDIO

Greetings

JOHN ELDREDGE



man being and understand that here lies the ultimate germ of the disease, is too remote to be practical. *The Plough and the Stars* goes further into the core of the war problem than any film I have yet seen. *Journey's End*, *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *What Price Glory?* showed us the effect of war on the individual, rather than the cause of war in the individual. Here precisely is the theme of *The Plough and the Stars*.

**W**E do not have the point of view, so often seen in the other war films, of the men who fight the enemy yet have no grudge against them and wonder what they are fighting for. This point of view is irrelevant by the very fact that it is impersonal. It does not exemplify the fighting spirit in its ultimate unremovability from the human spirit, which is precisely what *The Plough and the Stars* does. This picture shows us the real, personal, individual causation which impels a man to go out and fight another man. Through the dramatic *personalness* of the film we realize immediately and fully how deep is the need in these men to fight. Here is the core of the problem. They fight to free their Ireland, and they fight because their friends are in the same fight and they cannot let them down, and they fight because their fathers died in the same cause and they cannot let them down.

To be sure, they are fighting to free themselves from a yoke imposed by other men's greed and passion for power, but in them all resides this common fighting germ without which the situation could never have arisen. These men have immediate, personal, emotional reasons to fight, and these reasons must be conquered in human nature before we can get anywhere in wiping out war. The dramatist distills and crystallizes this for us, the studio brings it to the whole world of motion picture audiences, and as a result we have a picture which is great and important quite apart from its artistic perfection.

**N**EVER before have the sweat and the blood of the personal will to fight been so realistically set before us on the screen, or the hopeless plight of the women left behind. "They're all cowards, afraid to fight," cries Nora, and she comes close to the heart of part of the problem. And at the end, when the uprising has been quelled and the flag hauled down, and when she complains bitterly of the useless wastage of life and tells Jack that he and his comrades will never free Ireland, he turns upon her and says, "We'll go on fighting till we do." And she says, forlornly, "Aye, and we'll go on weeping." There is the crux and the core of the tragedy to war.

*The Plough and the Stars* is a serious picture for serious audiences, and it will find its public. That RKO had the courage to make the film according to the play instead of pandering to the last gum-chewing drug store cowboy in the audience is a great compliment to the intellectual independence of the company. This picture is a concrete step in the direction of socially valid cinema, and it will bring great credit to the studio and to all those who played a part in its production.

Warners booked *Gold Diggers of 1937* into 250 theatres for Christmas week.

## Kay Francis at Her Best

**STOLEN HOLIDAY**, Warners release of First National picture. Executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Harry Joe Brown; directed by Michael Curtiz; screen play by Casey Robinson; original story by Warren Duff and Virginia Kellogg; photography by Sid Hickox; film editor, Terry Morse; art director, Anton Grot; musical direction by Leo F. Forbstein; dialogue director, Stanley Logan; special photographic effects by Fred Jackman; gowns by Orry-Kelly. Cast: Kay Francis, Claude Rains, Ian Hunter, Alison Skipworth, Alexander D'Arcy, Betty Lawford, Walter Kingsford, Charles Halton, Frank Reicher, Frank Conroy, Egon Brecher, Robert Strange, Kathleen Howard, Wedgewood Nowell. Running time, 84 minutes.

**T**AILORED to fit her as snugly as the devastating gowns Orry-Kelly created for her to wear, the story of *Stolen Holiday* gives Kay Francis an opportunity to turn in a performance that will give complete satisfaction to her army of admirers. We see her first as a mannequin in some of the most artistic sets Anton Grot has designed for Warners and which Sid Hickox's photography brings to the screen in a series of beautiful shots. Later, Kay gets her own establishment, thus providing Grot, Orry-Kelly and Hickox with further opportunities to please our eyes. The whole production is an ambitious one which reflects credit on the Warner technical staff. The story is interesting, the performances unusually good, and we can put *Stolen Holiday* on the season's list of worthwhile pictures. Harry Joe Brown, associate producer, can take a bow for a job well done.

The story sustains Warner Brothers' reputation as headline hunters. It is a screen realization of the fictional possibilities suggested by the Stavisky scandal which shook all France a few years ago. I do not know where the line of demarcation is drawn between fact and fiction, but the two have been blended into a most interesting narrative. Casey Robinson, one of our most talented film writers, wrote a worthy screen play from the original story by Warren Duff and Virginia Kellogg. The result is by no means a motion picture, but it is a satisfactory talkie. Also it is a verbose talkie, sticking to a chattering course throughout and using sets and action merely as backgrounds for conversations. If you are a little weary after a hard day at the office, you will find the picture requires more mental concentration than perhaps is agreeable when you seek film entertainment.

**K**AY FRANCIS is wholly feminine throughout. Her sense of the obligation of friendship is her impelling motive and the story's theme. She does not love Claude Rains, who plays the Stavisky role, but because his friendship had made possible her success, she marries him in a last minute attempt to save him when the law is on his heels. A loveless marriage is a dangerous thing for a picture to tackle, but Kay plays her part with so much feeling and conviction that we get her point of view, and while we may not applaud her action, we at least condone it.

Rains paints a vivid portrait of a super-scoundrel who robs French people of hundreds of millions of francs by the methods Stavisky employed. He manages to gain a measure of our liking. His love for Kay is genuine, his manner ingratiating and plausible, and something to ad-

# PAUL KOHNER



## Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

# IRVING PICHEL



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—Beverly Hills in  
LIBERTY MAGAZINE.

# ROBERT FLOREY

DIRECTED

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mire is the nerve he displays when disaster overtakes him. The picture rather serves to answer a question still agitating France: Did Stavisky kill himself or was he shot by officers of the law? The officers say it was suicide; the picture says he was killed by the police. On the screen the name of the character is Orloff. Ian Hunter shares the real romance with Kay and gets her in the end. As always is the case with Hunter, his performance is graceful, appealing and intelligent. The others in the cast lend strong support. The direction of Michael Curtiz is excellent throughout, amply developing all the possibilities of his story material.

## Crazily Clever

WAY OUT WEST, Metro release of Hal Roach picture. Stan Laurel, associate producer. Directed by James W. Horne; original story by Jack Jevne and Charles Rogers; screen play by Charles Rogers, James Parrott and Felix Adler; photography by Art Lloyd and Walter Lundin; film editor, Bert Jordan; sound supervised by William Randall; art direction, Arthur I. Royce; settings by W. L. Stevens; musical direction by Marvin Hatley; photographic effects by Roy Seawright. Cast: Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, Sharon Lynne, James Finlayson, Rosina Lawrence, Stanley Fields, Vivien Oakland and The Avalon Boys. Running time, 69 minutes.

*Reviewed by Paul Jacobs*

**O**BVIOUSLY, Hal Roach has learned the inner purpose of screen art: to pack the mind in moth-balls for a brief time and let the carefully restricted emotions come out and play. *Way Out West* has all the exhilarating tonic of the unashamedly absurd; one comes away feeling years younger and practically kittenish. And any film that can produce such an effect is worth making an effort to see.

Of course, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy are grin-provoking just to look at; it's an intensely cultivated art. But when an expert like James W. Horne puts them through the carefully planned asinineties of *Way Out West*, their abilities are brought to the focal point. With the thoroughly competent help of James Parrot and Felix Adler, Charles Rogers took the original story he had concocted with Jack Jevne and turned it into a masterpiece of preposterousness.

Attuned to the hyperbolic tempo, the cast lends Mr. Laurel and Mr. Hardy ample counter-foiling. Sharon Lynne burlesques the sex-appeal cleverly, and reliable old Jimmy Finlayson brings us his usual humor. Brief but effective bits by Stanley Fields, Rosina Lawrence, and Vivien Oakland add to the general excellence. Dinah and the Avalon Boys, while thrust in somewhat abruptly, are expert enough to excuse their presence; especially as they make possible a terrifically funny dance by our two cut-ups. Capably editing by Bert Jordan and novel sound effects by Wm. Randall round out the smoothly balanced production.

**W**HEN Pete Smith was making *Wanted, a Master*, a short in which a dog stars, one scene demanded that the dog should yawn. After two days of trying, the director informed Pete that all efforts to make the dog yawn had been unsuccessful. Pete did some heavy pondering. After a while he placed the dog on a table and yawned mightily about two inches south of the canine snout. The dog yawned. Simple.

## Weak Plot But Well Done

THE HOLY TERROR, Twentieth Century-Fox. Directed by James Tinling; associate producer, John Stone; original screen play by Lou Breslow and John Patrick; music and Lyrics: "There I Go Again" "I don't Know Myself Since I Know You" "Don't Sing—Everybody Swing" "The Call of the Siren" by Sidney Clare and Harry Akst; dances staged by Jack Haskell; photography, Daniel B. Clark, A. S. C.; art direction, Albert Hogsett; assistant director, William Eckhardt; film editor, Nick De Maggio; costumes, Herschel; sound, W. D. Flick, Harry M. Leonard; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Jane Withers, Anthony Martin, Leah Ray, El Brendel, Joe Lewis, Wallace John Eldredge, Gloria Roy, Andrew Tombes, Joan Davis, Gavin Muir, Fred Kohler, Jr. Victor Adams, Raymond Brown.

*Reviewed by Paul Jacobs*

**JAMES TINLING** again gives us a well directed farce with Jane Withers' twinkling toes setting the tuneful tempo and starting all the giggling. Sidney Clare and Harry Akst are responsible for the lilting tunes that make *The Holy Terror* a writing job which Lou Breslow and John Patrick may be smug over. Creating sensible spots for melodies is a difficult task, as witness the long stream of foolish attempts in the "theme-song" era. That their plot is definitely weak despite its novelties does not overshadow its rhythmic cohesion.

Skilfully edited by Nick De Maggio and spangled by Jack Haskell's clever dances, *The Holy Terror* forms a natural atmosphere for the splendid voice of Anthony Martin and the sweet charm of Leah Ray. El Brendel, while a clever comedian, is given a role so stupid that he cannot lift it out of the boring. Twenty years ago it would have made him famous. To a lesser degree Joe Lewis is similarly handicapped. John Eldridge gives us a sensitive and finished performance; Gloria Roy grabs laughs right and left in a genuinely funny characterization.

With capable support by Andrew Tombes, Joan Davis, Gavin Muir, Fred Kohler, Jr., Victor Adams and Raymond Brown, *The Holy Terror* adds another pleasing 'kid' comedy to the surprising number of similar successes turned out by Twentieth Century-Fox.

## Benny and Blue Score

COLLEGE HOLIDAY, Paramount production and release. Harlan Thompson, associate producer; directed by Frank Tuttle; screen play by J. P. McEvoy, Harlan Ware, Henry Meyers and Jay Gorney; assistant director, Joseph Lefert; film editor, LeRoy Stone; art directors, Hans Dreier and Robert Usher; photographed by Theodor Sparkuhl and William C. Mellor; dances staged by LeRoy Prinz; costumes, Edith Head; musical direction, Boris Morros; songs by Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin; Burton Lane and Ralph Freed. Cast: Jack Benny, Gorge Burns and Gracie Allen, Mary Boland, Martha Raye, Ben Blue, Marsha Hunt, Leif Erikson, Eleanore Whitney, Johnny Downs, Etienne Girardot, Olympe Bradna, Louis DaPron, Jed Prouty, Margaret Seddon, Nick Lukats, Speck O'Donnell, Jack Chapin, California Collegians. Running time; 87 minutes.

*Reviewed by Paul Jacobs*

**FOR** one thing, I am an enraptured follower of the insouciant Mr. Benny. There is more subtle, spine-tickling humor in Jack's indolent drawl and small-boy indignations than in the Hollywood host of humorists put together. Ben Blue runs Mr. Benny a close second in the laugh grabbing, and anyone who runs anywhere

## Howard Ellis Smith

TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX



## Casey Robinson

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A Midsummer Night's Dream

near the mark set by the jovial Jello man is tops in entertainment. One of the funniest scenes of the year is a dance in which Blue pinch-hits for a professional; that the dance is a sheer riot can be imagined when you know that Gracie Allen and George Burns are the other two participants.

As the thin-minded simperer who complicates what little plot there is, Mary Boland gives her usual gleaming performance. Martha Raye justifies her new position as a luminary by—going to town—is the only way to put it. She tosses a verve into her songs and dances that electrifies her audience.

**J**OHNNY DOWNS gives us a new slant on his very pleasing personality, by a song-and-dance act that mark him as surprisingly versatile. Marsha Hunt shows to advantage, and does a cute job of falling in love, with Leif Erikson as the lucky boy. Leif is lucky in many ways; he possesses the frame, appearance, personality and voice necessary for eventual stardom. Competent support by Eleanore Whitney, Etienne Girardot, Jed Prouty, and others round out a uniformly excellent cast.

I bow in admiration to the excellent production of Harlan Thompson, and to his ace director, Frank Tuttle; they make a crack team. J. P. McEvoy, with Harlan Ware, Henry Meyers and Jay Gorney offer an acceptable script; it is customary to hang spectacle pictures on a thin plot. *College Holiday* is no exception, but it is treated novelly, and skilfully edited by LeRoy Stone. Hans Dreier and Robert Usher outdo themselves in tasteful effects and are outstandingly supported by the fine camera work of Theodor Sparkuhl and Wm. C. Mellor.

Snappy dances by LeRoy Prinz, the clever costuming of Edith Head and the briefly tantalizing songs combine to produce a sure-fire entertainment for anyone who appreciates the best in the collegiate.

## *Cinematic Pulse*

*By Paul Jacobs*

**O**F ALL the errors made by producers, perhaps the most vital and thus the most absurd, is their costly and wasteful game of hide-and-go-seek for writers and for story material. Mr. Beaton has given SPECTATOR readers a comprehensive but general picture of this situation. A more detailed and particular analysis is in order.

As Mr. Beaton has pointed out, producers are constantly in a state of fevered anxiety because of what they term shortage of material. To a seasoned writer this idea is funny. Any writer worth his salt can turn out a dramatically sound, moodful, powerfully tempoed story, rich in human values and built entirely of the ingredients of audience-attention. And he can turn it out in short order, and along any theme or story-movement desired. Because this is true, and true of literally dozens of competent craftsmen in Hollywood, there should be no shortage of stories, or at least of potential stories.

But producers evidently doubt this. Let's take a look at the professional writer's methods and see how com-



petent and business-like his approach to his work is, and why it is possible for him to turn out a consistently uniform series of fine scripts.

**I**N *THE* first place, the good writer is never at a loss for material. The world about him is his endless source. He knows that the unaided imagination is fickle and traitorous; in consequence he has trained himself to do both laboratory and field-work. That is, he scans the daily paper for plot ideas, for clever or meaty dialogue, and files each tid-bit away. He listens to conversations, he notices gossipers, he watches for character traits, he studies his friends, his relatives and any and everyone he meets. And all of it goes immediately into notes which are filed. Thus the professional writer is always ready for whatever writing task he is assigned because he has made of his writing a science.

His field-work has given him the raw material; he now proceeds to segregate it for laboratory use. And here we see how vast are the possible number of story types from which to draw; how impossible it is to lack novelty or originality in films, provided the writer is given an opportunity; and how outrageous is the system which drags the same old hackneyed ideas to the screen. Every writer knows the comparatively small story classification which follows. There are many more, but space forbids a complete one, so this compilation from Esenwein will have to serve; it points out, I am sure, the unlimited possibilities.

Classification based on:

1. Social Classes: rich, poor, society, middle, lower and criminal.
2. Locality: country, city, sectional, national, international, foreign.
3. Occupations: labor, trades, business, professions (learned arts and real and pseudo sciences), army and navy, recreations (travel, sports, games, theatres and movies), adventure, college and school.
4. Wonder: fantastic, weird, psychic, detective.
5. Emotions: love, hate, friendship, heroism, jealousy, revenge.
6. Moral Nature: character development, character deterioration, character crisis, character revelation, religious problem home and family, war, politics.

**T**HE above list makes poor reading, but when we stop to consider that every item carries its own particular problems and conditions, and that each one in all the classifications holds hundreds of plot possibilities, this uninteresting list assumes sudden significance. Having been assigned a particular type of story, the writer first narrows his scope to one of the only two possible treatments of his material: the story will be either one of *achievement*, in which the main actor is faced with a problem which he must solve by a course of action; or, the story will be one of *decision*, in which the main actor is faced with two opposing desires or conditions, usually in the form of an emotional problem.

Either treatment may be used for any plot-idea, although there is a natural adaptitude inherent in the material which indicates the choice. The principal difference



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**JACK DUNN**



**WARREN GROAT**

**Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer**



E. A. DUPONT  
UNDER CONTRACT  
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FOY

Associate  
Producer

WARNER BROS.-  
FIRST NATIONAL

lies in the fact that in the achievement treatment, the story is not launched until the main actor decides or is thrust upon, a course of action. In the decision type of treatment, the story is ended when the main actor decides upon what course to pursue. This probably seems terribly involved; but I think an example may clear up the idea.

**L**ET us take the good old triangle. A man is lured from the arms of his wife by some slinky siren. There is the plot-idea used by every producer whenever he becomes inspired to do something new. If it is to be treated as an achievement story, the wife decides to win back the erring one. Her course of action, then, is a series of attempts to defeat the slinky lady. If the producer wants a decision story, the husband perhaps will wish to return, and the wife will be uncertain; she will be torn between love for her husband and, let us say, her moral convictions in the matter. At any odds, there must be some opposing force within her. When she finally comes to her choice of whether or not she will accept her chastened and humbled husband, the story is done. Properly written, the decision story offers far greater opportunity for deep human-interest values. In a later article I will delineate fully the mechanics and differences in approach of these two methods of treatment.

It is in his next step that the writer vastly increases his volume of material from which to select stories. Having chosen his treatment, he decides on the *emotional emphasis*. He may throw emphasis on characterization, on plot-complications, on story atmosphere or mood, or on the theme. All of them must carry a part of the total effect, but pressure on one of them will bring out the varying shades of emotional impression so necessary for audience interest. It may be well to explain briefly the uses and effects of these emotion-building devices.

**W**HEN emphasis in a film is thrown on character, the inner struggle of an actor's soul carries the story weight. Emphasis on plot-complication gives us the bulk of farce and comedy or mystery. Emphasis on atmosphere results in the weird or horror picture, where the actor must struggle against the effect of the atmosphere itself, as though it were an actual antagonist. Films in which the hero almost goes mad, cast away on a desert island, for example, illustrate this use of mood emphasis. And finally, perhaps most striking of all, the story of theme which illustrates some great human truth, such as "As ye sow, so shall ye also reap," etc., gives us the sure-fire emphasis upon which a large proportion of successful films are made.

From the foregoing, it should become evident that there is still another category of material for the writer to choose from in plotting his ideas—the various types of action around which to build. The producer may want a Western; in which case the clash of opposed wills will usually be between man and man. It may, however, be between man and the forces of nature. If the producer calls for drama, it will be between man and man (or man and woman, or woman and woman); or it will be a clash between man and his own emotions.

Thus it is plain that by manipulation (a) classifications, (b) treatments, (c) emotional emphasis, (d) types of action, absolutely endless numbers of stories are available from the thousands of possible combinations. Any capable writer could turn out, from this small list alone, enough original material to satisfy the most voracious producer. And I speak of one writer, not the customary half-dozen. With scores of fine writers idle in Hollywood, no wonder the editors of SPECTATOR gurgled in their pipes whenever they hear that familiar lament "I could turn out great pictures, if I had the material!"

## As Others Comment

**A**CTION is the life blood of motion pictures. The screen's sacrifice of it to dialogue has been one of the SPECTATOR's laments since sound came to Hollywood. *Film Weekly*, London, an excellent film magazine, has something to say about action: "The Westerns are on their way back. *The Texas Rangers* rode into the Carlton this week in a flurry of gun-play and hard-fisted melodrama. Soon will come De Mille's Buffalo Bill epic, with Gary Cooper and Jean Arthur—another film distinguished by its wide canvas and vigorous action. Action—that is the secret of big pictures. The secret of *The Covered Wagon*, of *Ben Hur*, of *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, of *Mutiny on the Bounty*. Go on a film set any day and you will hear the director say: 'Roll 'em.' The cameras begin to turn. As the negative is running at top speed, the director turns to his players and commands: 'Action.' The words have been handed down from the days of silent films. Their significance is not always fully realized. We are still a little obsessed by the possibilities of sound. We have almost forgotten the virtue of silence. Too often, when the director asks for 'Action,' he is merely demanding speech. It is only when such films as *The Texas Rangers* or *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* come along that we realize that great films are still the films of action. When Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, the two play-boy wits of films, were producing their own pictures in New York, they plastered the studio with banners and placards. One said: What Is The Audience Doing All This Time? Hollywood might take a tip from that. Every motion picture studio needs to have its walls covered with the question: What Is The Actor Doing All This Time? Unless he is *doing* something, the picture is becoming slow, stale and unprofitable. That is a rule that applies to every picture—comedy as well as drama. Capra knows it. The scene in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* in which Gary Cooper plays the tuba at his own farewell party, is funnier than any scene with words. Lubitsch knows it, De Mille knows it, Griffith knew it. All the masters of the cinema have appreciated the value of action. After all, we call them *moving pictures*."

\* \* \*  
**T**HIS by Rob Wagner, in *Script*: We read Welford Beaton principally for his good English. Though eminently sane in most of his opinions, he has a few that he rides to death. But in the last HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR he voices one that should be read and digested by every

HAL HORNE

WALTER WANGER  
PRODUCTIONS, Inc.

**EDWARD LUDWIG**

**DIRECTING**  
**The Love Trap**  
for  
**B. P. SCHULBERG**



MARIE WILSON  
WISHES THE SPECTATOR  
A HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS  
NEW YEAR



JACK OTTERSON  
ART DIRECTOR  
NEW UNIVERSAL STUDIO



star and producer in Movieland. It has to do with the stupid and hurtful publicizing of the stars. Welford insists that they lose the glamour of mystery by appearing on the stage, and being heard on the radio. We thoroughly agree with him, and have often called attention to a star's shrinkage when he or she appears behind the footlights after a 'premeer.' We once listened in on one of Louella's programs and blushed at the blah, blah to which the star was subjected.

\* \* \*

**A**T LEAST one other screen commentator regards Shakespeare as a screen writer precisely as the SPECTATOR regards him, as set forth in our review of the big Metro production, *Romeo and Juliet*. *Variety* (N. Y.), reviews at length the English-made *As You Like It*, praising the fidelity with which it adheres to Shakespearean tradition, but remarking, "Judged purely as screen entertainment, it is far too static to rank." Readers who may recall the SPECTATOR's remarks on Shakespeare as a contributor of screen story material, will note the similarity between our conclusions and those of *Variety's* reviewer, who goes on to say: "*As You Like It* suggests that the value of Shakespeare to the screen is more strictly in the creation of prestige for the individual production company than in the accumulation of receipts. Here, in fact, is a beautifully made film, with direction and settings that redound to the eternal credit of British pictures; with acting and presentation that interpret the play according to the finest traditions of the drama, but which, nevertheless, is too much lacking in the accepted standards of screen technique to rouse much enthusiasm among the multitude."

\* \* \*

**P**HIL SCHEUER, in *Los Angeles Times*: Welford Beaton in the HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR invites this column to join him "in a spirited campaign" to restore eyebrows to actresses—like Shirley Ross in *Hideaway Girl*—who have lost them. "The casualties among feminine eyebrows have been terrific during the last year or two," he writes, "and if our screen girls could realize how grotesque they look without them they would stop mislaying them." This column goes further. It vigorously indorses Beaton's campaign against unnecessary loud talking in the cinema, as well as James Francis Crow's movement to abolish what he accurately describes as "formularized whimsy." . . . It falls upon its actor-victim with dreadful suddenness, this scourge, making playful half-wits and coy caper-cutters out of grown men and women, and is the most virulent epidemic to hit town since the close of the silent era, when George Marion, Jr., and Ralph Spence invented wisecracking subtitles. If we don't watch out, formularized whimsy may end the talkie era.

\* \* \*

**O**VER in London they are cashing in on the public's craze for personal contact with screen stars, as witnesseth this by "Tatler," in *Daily Film Renter*: "I was saying the other day that if the crowds of fans and autograph hunters continue to mob film stars, people like Marlene Dietrich may eventually be forced to see their films in private! Apparently, I didn't know my Dietrich, because I've just got notice which tells me she is to at-

tend a Red Cross Ball at Grosvenor House on November 25, when—runs the blurb—'Special balcony accommodation affording a close-up view of the film star will be available at a charge of five shillings per head, to the hundreds of fans who have mobbed Miss Dietrich on her recent appearances in public . . .' All I can say is, that if the crowd is anything like the seething masses who have fought to get a glimpse of her at premieres lately, the Red Cross Society should be able to make a goodly sum of money! It's a sensible idea."

\* \* \*

**A**NOTHER suggestion for curing the autograph evil comes from England. G. A. Atkinson, the able editor of *The Era*, London, has this to say: "A covey of film stars, including some of the over-sold Hollywood visitors, went to the play the other evening, and ruined the entrance of the leading players by arriving late, because the attention of the audience became fixed on the ballyhoo going on in and around the boxes. There was Royalty present that evening, but Royalty is unostentatious. Outside the theatre a mob gathered and eventually milled into the foyer. When the film party began to make its exit the mob made a rush. Royalty, and celebrity scarcely less distinguished, was hustled against the walls, while autograph books were thrust into the hands of the screen people. . . . It would be a mistake to suppose that public appearances, and the ballyhoo of being mobbed in the streets or at railway stations, increase the box-office value of film stars. Experience shows that the reverse is the case, and that the over-publicised and over-photographed star is quite frequently a 'flop' on the screen, public curiosity about her having been already satisfied through other channels."

**M**R. ATKINSON continues: "The most significant example of the reverse process is Garbo, who, by sheer reticence in the face of public curiosity, has acquired more box-office prestige than all the notoriety hunters rolled together. It seems to me that it would be a very simple matter to turn the autograph racket, which is the chief cause of the present public disturbances over film stars, into legitimate and useful channels. Let the stars send their autographs to a Central Bureau, and refuse to wield the pen or pencil in public. The Bureau could then sell the autographs at standard rates to admirers and devote the proceeds, less a small percentage for expense, to the Cinematograph Trade Benevolent Fund or to the purchase of a retiring pension for the star. They don't all finish in wealth."

\* \* \*

**E**DGAR DALE, Ohio University staff member who is taking a leading part in promoting the study of motion picture appreciation throughout the country, writes in *Scholastic*, the American high school weekly: "I realize that I am raising a larger question—what is the function of the motion picture critic? Is he merely to give a judgment on several hundred pictures a year, judgments wholly unrelated to each other? Or is he to see the motion picture steadily and see it whole? What motion picture critic in the country was sufficiently sensitive to community attitudes toward motion pictures to predict a wave

# A. M. BOTSFORD

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UNITED ARTISTS



Martin G. Cohn

FILM EDITOR

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Compliments

of

The Season

Richard Whiting

COMPOSER

JANE  
DARWELL



of antagonism toward the producers? Maybe there were several. I know of only two—W. Ward Marsh of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and Welford Beaton of the *Hollywood Spectator*. Both of these critics in their columns warned producers that they must eliminate the obscene and tawdry from the movies if they wanted to avoid the wrath of the people.”

\* \*

**O**NCE before the SPECTATOR quoted some of the exceedingly wise picture criticisms found in *Motion Picture Herald's* "What the Picture Did for Me," department. They are contributed by exhibitors all over the country, and are based on the box-office reaction to the pictures mentioned. Here are some interesting specimens;

*Country Doctor*: Jean Hersholt, Dorothy Peterson—Very fine show. No business to speak of, due to epidemic of paralysis.—*Sammie Jackson, Jackson Theatre, Flomaton, Alabama.*

*Country Doctor*: Not as big as exploitation, but different and good draw at box office. A woman's picture. Slim Summer-ville and the quintuplets outstanding. Understand this picture got Papa Dionne sore. Thinks director made a joke out of him. "Papa" has it on them all in some respects, and is some kidder himself—five at a time. Played August 7-8—*D. M. Reardon, Globe Theatre, Holyoke, Massachusetts.*

*Bride Walks Out*: Barbara Stanwyck, Gene Raymond—Don't be afraid to let your patrons know you have a swell show for them. They will all leave with a smile, which makes you glad you are a showman. That boy, Raymond, is sure up and coming, and Ned Sparks did not hurt the show a bit. Running time, 80 minutes. Played August 22-23.—*H. M. Gerber, Roxy Theatre, Hazelton, North Dakota.*

# Charles Kenyon

Under Contract to  
**UNIVERSAL**

# Dalton Trumbo

WRITING FOR  
**COLUMBIA PICTURES**

**Season's Greetings**

to

**Welford Beaton**

■

**Schulberg Studios, Inc.**



# Hunt Stromberg

**PRODUCING**

**for**

## METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER



# Cinematic Fable

*By Mabel Keefler*

**O**NCE upon a time there was a Producer of Motion Pictures who felt vague stirrings of dissatisfaction within himself. At first he hardly was conscious of them, but as time went on the stirrings became more and more pronounced, until he felt himself to be engulfed in a veritable whirlwind of unrest. At last, in desperation, he sought the solitude of the woods to see if, perchance, he might obtain surcease from the thing that was troubling him.

Walking among the tall, stately trees he listened to the orchestral silence of the forest and felt a sensation of calm and well-being stealing over him. Suddenly the forest seemed to come alive. The trees took on personality, the wood-creatures had a human touch—even the occasional little forest flowers nodded importantly. As the bewildered P. of M. P. tried to sense what was happening, a deep, resonant Voice, that seemed to emanate from a tall pine, spoke: "You have done well to seek counsel of us, O my brother! Would that humans would more often commune with us!"

"But what is this vague thing that troubles me?" asked the P. of M. P. "Why am I so sore distressed?"

Again came the deep Voice: "You are troubled because you are not extracting to the full the value of the great medium which has been placed in your hands for the benefit of mankind."

"You mean the Cinema? But, we are giving the world great Pictures. . . ."

**T**HERE is, indeed, much to commend in your achievements," interrupted the Voice, "but there are great potentialities which are being ignored. We who stand as sentinels throughout the ages, know whereof we speak."

"And these potentialities. . . ?"

The deep richness of the Voice became more pronounced: "Of first importance is the unparalleled opportunity to mold the attitude of men toward life and living. Not only in the big things, but in the little things. We of the forest know the importance of small things—indeed, where would we be were it not for seeds?"

The P. of M. P. was listening intently. "You mean that we may plant. . . ." "You may plant ideas and ideals," replied the Voice, "the psychological effect of which will benefit even the box-office."

"And what should go into the making of this screen entertainment?" queried the P. of M. P.

**U**P spoke a pert young sapling: "And then there is the little matter of what should not go into it!"

"Yes." This was a voice with a laughing lilt. "Humans are so funny! Particularly the humans who make the picture entertainment!"

"Do you mean 'queer' funny, or 'ha, ha' funny?" asked the sapling.

"'Queer' funny, of course!" replied the lilting Voice. "It isn't 'ha, ha' funny that with a whole harp of beautiful ideas to play on, they use only a few strings!"



"In other words, you mean to say that they 'harp' on a few ideas." A gale of laughter swept the forest at this quip of the sapling. The little flowers shook with mirth, adding their tinkling notes.

"To whit! To whoo!" The P. of M. P. almost jumped out of his skin as an old owl appeared in the hollow of a tree. "What's all this infernal racket about? A fellow can't get a good day's sleep in this place to save his neck!"

**T**HIS human seeketh counsel of us, O Wise One!" The Voice spoke soothingly.

"He'd jolly well better," sputtered the owl. "Owls are not the only ones who are blind in daylight!"

The P. of M. P. was amused. "And what do you suggest, O Wise One?"

The owl blinked impatiently. "Use more stories written for—what do you call it?—screen—that's it—use more stories written for your screen! Get rid of the idea that what's sauce for the stage is sauce for the screen."

"And your love interest..." This was the lilting Voice. "Don't you humans ever get tired of triangles and all sorts of horrid mix-ups?"

The owl was disappearing in the hollow of the tree as he called: "Human, you'd better remember that! To whit: Make your pictures to show more of the better side of life! To whoo: The whole world."

The deep Voice then spoke: "You will do well to heed their advice, O my brother... Use your screen medium to show more of the beauty of life and less of its ugliness... Shun cheapness as you shun disease... Give your humans much laughter—good rollicking laughter."

"I have heard that one of your little girl humans once prayed: 'Oh, God, make bad people good and good people nice!' And you, likewise, make your screen entertainment to show the good things of life as attractive as they really are. I have spoken, O my brother!"

**T**HE P. of M. bowed his head in thanks... The forest took on a great stillness, and he went his way homeward...

Immediately the P. of M. P. began to work along the lines laid down by his forest friends. His associates wailed and protested, but to no avail. As a matter of fact, he scarcely heard them, so wrapt up was he in carrying out his new ideas. But once, when his associates became too insistent, he exploded with—"To whit! To whoo!—er, that is—I mean to say—er, don't bother me!" And they went their way sorrowfully—shaking their heads and chanting, "But it isn't good box-office! It isn't good box-office!" This they chanted so loud and so long that when they finally realized what was happening to the film industry, they had no time to take a breath before they were obliged to change their chant to, "But it is good box-office! It is good box-office!"

**A**S I listened with pleasure to Claude Rains' perfect diction in a recent picture, I wondered if he would not be more convincing as the person he played if his speech showed a trace of carelessness. In real life few people speak meticulously as an actor does on the stage.



**RAY**

**ENRIGHT**



**Director**

**Warner Brothers**

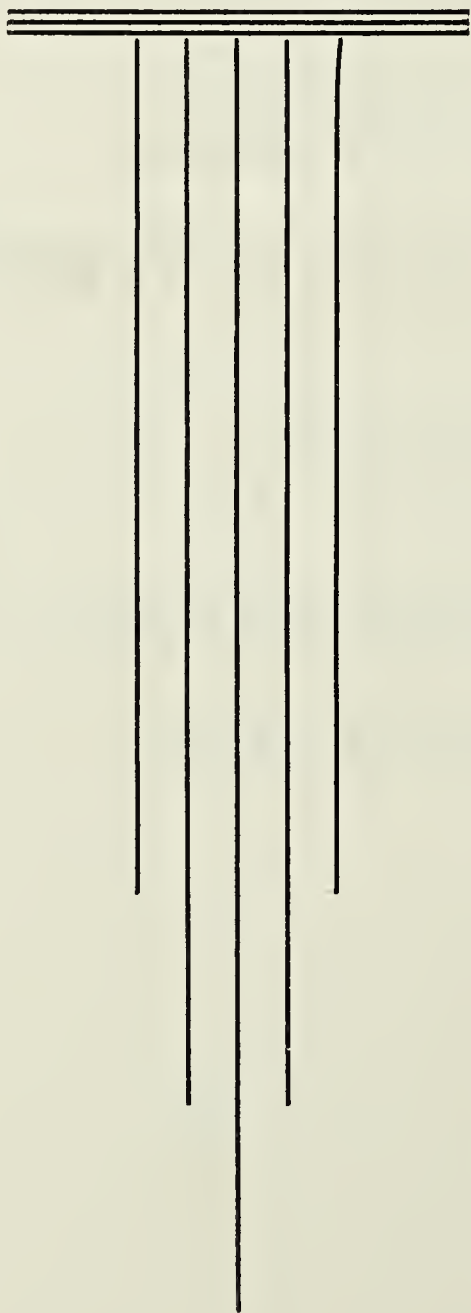
**First National**



*Glad To Be Back*

**CHARLES F. RIESNER**

PARAMOUNT



## Editor's Postscripts

**W**HEN the script calls for an actor to do a lot of drinking in a picture, care must be taken to see that what he drinks does not give him stomach-ache, the studio's contention being that if an actor desires to get a stomach-ache he must acquire it on his own time and without the cooperation of anyone in the studio. The darker cocktails you see him drink are a mixture of coca cola and water; the lighter ones, gin cocktails, are water with a touch of syrup to make them photographic. The cherries and olives are real, and if the drinking scenes are shot often enough, the player can get a pretty good meal of sorts. He can drink the coca cola stuff all day without getting stomach-ache, if he had behaved the night before. When an actor's lips touch even the rim of a glass but does not drink what is in it, it is emptied and washed before being refilled. When the day's shooting is over, all the full glasses are emptied because during the night their contents would sour and anyone drinking them next morning surely would get stomach-ache. The persistent glass washing is demanded by the state sanitary laws and the studios are checked up regularly to see that there is no monkeying with the law. I got all this from Leo Sulky, former vaudevillian, while he was polishing glasses behind a bar you will see in the picture Lloyd Bacon is directing at the Warner studio, *Marked Woman*. Leo is playing a bartender, and his absorption in his art was so great that he kept on polishing glasses even though the camera was shooting something else in the next room.

**F**ROM the review of *Girls' Dormitory* in the SPECTATOR of August 1: "There is a young man in the cast whom I never saw before and who is not on the screen for more than two minutes. He is Tyrone Power, Jr. Some day soon he will be a leading box-office favorite. That much he established in his two minutes." A long time ago the SPECTATOR contained such references to first appearances

**Lew Ayres**

ACTOR ♦ DIRECTOR

**MAURICE DE PACKH**

of Myrna Loy, Jean Arthur and Bette Davis, but it took the producers years to catch up with us. Each of the girls suffered an eclipse in spite of my incessant barking to attract attention to her. It did not take long for Power to justify my judgment. His performance in *Lloyds of London* will make him the box-office figure I predicted.

\* \* \*  
**T**HE papers have it that James Stewart is learning to speak with a French accent to match Simone Simon's when he plays opposite her in *Seventh Heaven*. All the characters in the play are supposed to be talking French, hence accent of any sort will be out of place in the picture version.

\* \* \*  
**J**UST discovered that Deanna Durbin was born in my old home town, Winnipeg, Canada.

\* \* \*  
**T**HE first hundred years are the toughest. If the SPECTATOR can stick it out for a century, it may witness the acceptance by the film industry of all the fatherly advice it has been so generous with for its first decade. For instance, perhaps once a year it has urged producers to cast established heavies in sympathetic roles. No one equipped with something to think with can challenge the fundamental psychological soundness of the suggestion. Results are obtained after ten years of exploiting the idea—Joseph Calleia, one of our most sinister villains, is to play a sympathetic part in a Metro picture. If the story is a good one and the direction satisfactory—in other words, if Joe gets half a chance, he will be sensationally successful. It takes no brains to make the prediction;

**VIRGINIA FAULKNER**

Writer

**METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER**

**GREETINGS**

**WILLIAMS SLAVENS McNUTT**

**GEORGE AMY**

FILM EDITOR

**WARNER BROTHERS**



**NORMAN TAUROG**

**DIRECTOR**

**REUNION**



**Under Contract to**

**Twentieth Century-Fox**



# WALDEMAR

# YOUNG

*Screen Playwright*



Under Contract

to

Paramount

anyone with eyes would reach the same conclusion after watching him for two minutes in a scene in which he plays the villain.

\* \* \*  
**T**HE SPECTATOR views with dismay the inability of screen writers and producers to agree on allocation of screen credits. In a purely unselfish desire to promote an amicable settlement of the bothersome subject, we suggest to both parties that they eliminate all story credits from the screen. Of course, this would make us wonder who wrote the screen plays. To meet that objection, the SPECTATOR gladly would open its advertising columns to the writers who were denied publicity on the screen. Such advertisements would be accepted by us at no increase in the regular advertising rates. We not even would expect to be thanked for the brilliancy of the peace suggestion.

\* \* \*  
**P**ICTURE players whose careers are safe are those who support established stars. Stars are at the mercy of producers. If a picture is made poorly, its stars bear the burden of its failure. Producers interpret its box-office returns as indicating a lessening in the popularity of the star or stars, never as reflecting their own shortcomings as producers. A featured player does not suffer when a picture fails as he does not carry the weight of it. Stardom is a precarious profession for which wise supporting players have no hankering.

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# BERT LYTELL

DIRECTED

## ALONG CAME LOVE

A Richard A. Rowland  
Production for  
Paramount Release



WHEN I saw Bert Lytell listed as director, I wondered if this splendid trouper could subjugate his instinctive stage technique and training sufficiently to make a picture instead of a filmed play. I knew of his long years in both stage and screen as an actor of the first rank; but playing and directing are fields apart, and I suspected Bert's early training would prove to be too strong. However, I had not reckoned with Lytell's shrewd discrimination and keen sense of comparative dramatic values. His direction of *Along Came Love* is little short of a masterpiece. In its new position on the credits list, the name Bert Lytell will add new laurels to its already great distinction. — Hollywood Spectator.



LEW POLLACK and SIDNEY D. MITCHELL wrote the Lyrics and Music for Seven Tuneful and Entertaining Musical Numbers, and of all the Contributions to the Production, theirs are the Most Valuable. *From Welford Beaton's review of "Pigskin Parade."*



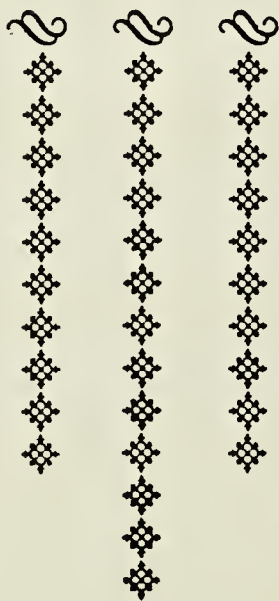
**WESLEY RUGGLES**

**DIRECTING**

**I Met Him in Paris**

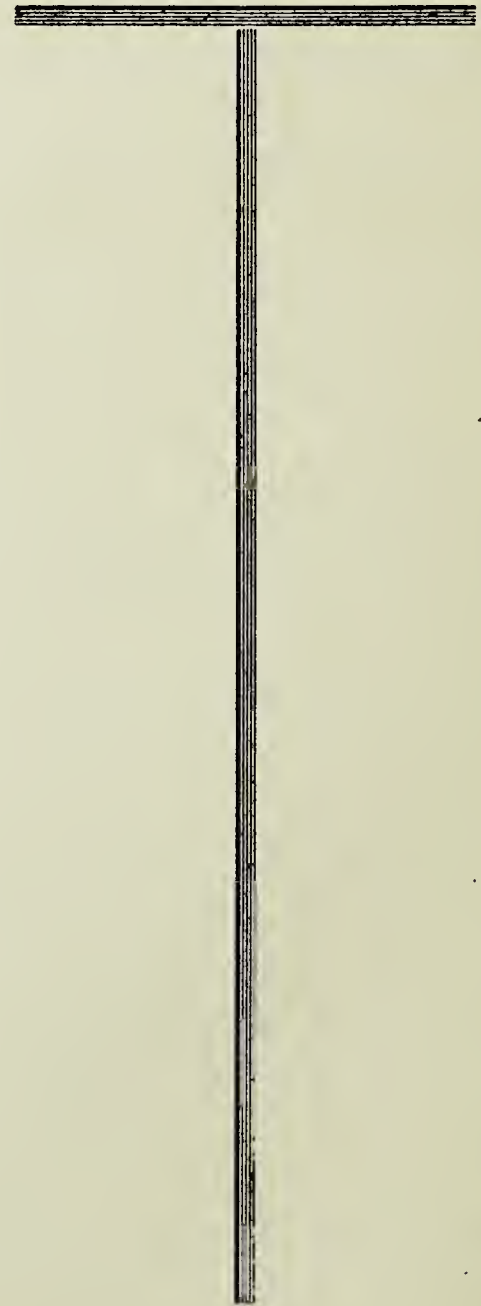
**for**

**PARAMOUNT**



**FRANK CAPRA**

**COLUMBIA STUDIO**



★ ★ ★

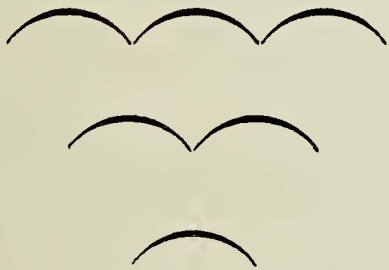
# Roy Del Ruth

Directing

## ON THE AVENUE

For

Twentieth Century-Fox



Current Release

## BORN TO DANCE

For Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

★ ★ ★



# William A. Seiter

Directed

## STOWAWAY

Starring

# SHIRLEY TEMPLE

For

Twentieth Century-Fox



ALFRED E. GREEN

DIRECTING FOR  
COLUMBIA



Current Release  
MORE THAN A SECRETARY

Present Assignment  
WEATHER OR NO



*Hollywood*

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CENTS

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Eleventh Year

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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*Paul Jacobs Discusses the Fundamentals of Screen Story Construction*

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From the

# Editor's Easy Chair

**N**OW word comes, via Ed Schallert's *Los Angeles Times* page, that some parties, identity not revealed, are going to start a rebellion, a revolution or some sort of indignant war to put a stop to Hollywood's practice of turning out three pretty bad class B pictures to one pretty good class A specimen. I have no idea how well organized the uprising is or will be, but I applaud its purpose and hope it achieves its objective. I warn the revolutionists, however, that they would be wise if they determined, before they open hostilities, what their answer will be when picture producers ask the inevitable question: "How are you going to effect the reforms you are clamoring for?" Producers will urge in their defense their lack of big names to sprinkle through more productions and the impossibility of getting more good stories than they are finding at present. Of course, there is no merit in such contentions, but producers are not aware of it and I doubt if the revolutionists are posted any better. I see most of the class B pictures and, as I have stated before in the *SPECTATOR*, I have not yet seen one which was not merely unrealized class A possibilities. Class B productions are suffering from neglect, from a lack of application of picture brains, not from the lack of big names or good stories. The most recent demonstration of the weakness of the big-names contention is the box-office success of *The Devil Is a Sissy* without a recognized star in its cast, but which is doing better business than *The Ex Mrs. Bradford* did with a strong cast headed by William Powell and Jean Arthur. The claim that good stories are scarce is absurd. The best screen stories have not yet been written. They are in the heads of writers now on studio pay-rolls, of writers starving on Hollywood hill-sides while producers by cable are buying inferior stuff European writers are turning out.

**A**S a matter of fact, the best screen stories now being written are those for the class B product. They are good because producers hold them in such low esteem they allow their writers to write them without the front-office meddling which hampers the work of those preparing the scripts for the pictures which producers deem important enough to engage their august attention. Not equipped mentally to estimate the screen values of original story material for their big stars, production executives rely on the judgment of editors, book publishers and play producers in the selection of material for their several requirements, even though the requirements are totally dif-

ferent from those of pictures. Budget limitations make impossible the purchase of such expensive story material for class B product, hence producers have to be content with the more suitable stories, conceived and prepared originally for the use to which they are put, and then they murder them on the way to the screen and offer the mangled remains to the public. Not infrequently after a preview of a class B picture its producer admonishes me to remember while writing my review that it is just an unimportant production. It would be wiser on the part of the producer if he from the start remembered it was to be a motion picture and tried to make it one worthy of the name. It would be a simple process. All the producer need do it to take an inventory of the picture brains on his lot, classify it, distribute his production according to his findings, then go away on a long holiday.

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**A** prominent screen critic encountered me in the lobby as we were leaving after a preview. "Of all the lousy pictures!" he exploded. Then he clutched my arm and said to me fervently, "Of all the people on earth, I envy you most." I was not fully aware of what he meant until I read his criticism. He praised the picture.

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**U**NLOADING the Mind: 1937 would have something to its credit if it got masters-of-ceremonies to cease saying, "Let's give the little girl a great big hand." A Boulevard merchant told me that "Do your Christmas shopping early" gets nowhere, that business started slowly, climbed steadily and reached its peak the day before Christmas; always does the same. . . . A young man I admire greatly is Buddy Rogers; the shift to sound did not get him down; he shrugged his shoulders, dug in, achieved great success by the application of brains and energy, his attractive personality doing the rest. . . . We have a friend who is such an auction-sale nut that the other day she bought a doorplate bearing the name of a man recently deceased. . . . I must not forget to go to the Olympic games in Tokio in 1940. . . . A man has not lived a full life until he has grandchildren with him around the tree on Christmas morning. . . . I do not understand how a person can embark deliberately on a career as a bass trombone player. . . . For a decade or so Mischa Auer nearly starved awaiting recognition; now is getting enough calls to keep three of him busy. . . .

Fascinating to watch Laughton's hands in *Rembrandt*; the hands of an artist, they play an important part in his characterization. . . . For deposit in my I-Told-You-So file: In the next few years Noah Beery, Jr. will develop into a big box-office star. . . . About the sweetest thing on the screen in Spring Byington's smile. . . . A Beverly Hills woman prefers taking a bus when she goes to downtown Los Angeles to shop; drove her car down to do some Christmas shopping; carried to her parked car purchases from each shop; made her last purchase and took a bus home; got mad as the devil when she realized she had to go all the way back for her car. . . . On my morning walk I meet milkmen principally; this morning I met a huge excavator being pushed and pulled uphill by two trucks; it is the largest thing I have met thus far; I stepped aside and let it pass. . . . I would like to see Johnathan Hale, the sympathetic judge in *The Devil is a Sissy*, in some good young-father parts which would allow him to demonstrate what an excellent actor he is. . . . I never eat rabbit, tripe, brains or gizzards.

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**T**HE SPECTATOR's selections of the best pictures of 1936 given in the last SPECTATOR were made from those reviewed by me during the calendar year and without reference to release dates. The Academy awards will not be made from the same list of pictures. *The Story of Louis Pasteur*, for instance, was reviewed in the SPECTATOR of December 7, 1935, but was not released until early in 1936. It, therefore, will come within the range of the Academy's judging, but was outside the range of my review of 1936. The best biographical film I reviewed last year was *The White Angel*. The best biographical film I ever saw was *The Story of Louis Pasteur*.

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**C**OLOR photography has a definite place on the screen. The progress technicolor is making toward perfection is important to Hollywood, but not by virtue of any help it can give feature productions. By its very approach to perfection it is getting farther from meeting the esthetic demands of the motion picture presenting dramatic entertainment. Color is real; a motion picture belongs exclusively to our mental world in which reality is an alien element. But in a travelogue, for instance, color belongs because the film deals with reality. Last night I saw a Fitzpatrick travelogue which showed scenes of Japan in cherry-blossom time. Let us dismiss the esthetic aspect of it with the statement that it is composed of scenes of great beauty. It's real value lies in its completeness as an educational document. Only color treatment could make it complete. If it were done in black and white photography we could imagine what the colors would be; but a documentary film should leave nothing to the imagination. If its scene showing a group of Japanese women is to teach us everything we wish to know, it must show us what colors the women fancy, as it must show us the actual color of the cherry blossoms if we are to know exactly what Japanese vistas look like when the blossoms are out. Color photography, therefore, is essential to the completeness of a travelogue.

**W**HY, then, is color not essential to the completeness of a photoplay? Japanese scenery is a fact in the material world, beyond the power of our imagination to recreate authentically. A photoplay is remote from physical reality, and the farther it gets away from reality, the closer it comes to our mental world. The only emotional values of a motion picture are those we ourselves put into it. We accept the human shadows we see on the screen as real people; their joys and sorrows are ours. In themselves the shadows have no emotions, no power to feel. Our imagination ascribes emotions to them. The sole mission of the screen is to prompt our emotional reaction, to direct our attention to the essential point. The act of attention can achieve its end only in the degree that there are no distractions to direct it elsewhere. If we are asked to accept the photograph of a woman as the woman herself, the completeness of our acceptance is lessened somewhat if the color of her gown is presented to us as a fact. Fact and fancy are not psychological bedfellows. The people we see in the travelogue are impersonal parts of the scenery; as individuals they are of no interest to us, but the color of their attire is of interest as reflecting national characteristics. The lights and shades of a photoplay suggest the colors we prefer to see, as the composition of scenes suggest perspective and the persistence of vision suggests movement in the rapid flow of still pictures projected on the screen.

**W**E participate in the drama we see in a motion picture. If it succeeds in its mission of controlling our emotions, the weeping woman we see is not an actress. To us she is the wife of the man who is dying on the bed. Another man we see is an officer of the law, and the shoulder of the man the officer's hand is on is that of the murderer who fired the shot which is proving fatal. If the play of our imagination did not produce such results, the screen drama would be meaningless to us. If we derive entertainment from it, it is because we entertain ourselves. We derive satisfaction from cooperating with it to the extent our cooperation is invited. Cooperation can be complete only when no element of reality is offered to distort the harmony of the unreality that serves as the material from which we fashion the drama that stirs us emotionally. Thus it is that we are entertained by what we imagine, not by what we see, consequently we must be entertained most when most is left to our imagination. We are pleased most with a woman's gown when our imagination determines its color. You think the woman should wear red; to you the gown is red. I think she should wear blue; to me the gown is blue. But technicolor shows the gown is green; neither of us is pleased. "But," Mrs. Spectator said to me when I read to her what I have written thus far, "lots of times when I see in a picture of a woman in a stunning gown, I wish I knew the color of it." "And that, my dear," I answered her, "is because the picture has failed in its prime purpose; it has failed to make complete your absorption in the drama it is unfolding, failed to stir your imagination to the point of providing the gown with the color you would like to see. A screen

creation made so indifferently that it prompts a desire it does not gratify, is outside the range of this discussion." And there the matter rested.

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**T**HE script for *Parnell*, being made into a picture by MGM, was written months before the King Edward-Mrs. Simpson love drama was enacted. When it is released it will be difficult to make the public believe the royal romance did not affect the writing of the script. The story of Parnell and Kitty O'Shea parallels closely that of Edward and Mrs. Simpson. In each case love for a woman was placed above duty to a country. Parnell was the uncrowned king of Ireland and his love for a married woman cost him his leadership. "Would you sacrifice your country to the love of a woman?" is one of the lines in the picture script. I understand the Metro publicity and advertising departments will make no great effort to draw the public's attention to the similarity between the two romances, confining themselves merely to advertising columns, feature stories with photographs, billboards, radio and perhaps a few other mediums no one yet has thought of but which they hope will include the use of colored searchlights and brass bands. Someone suggested bringing the Duke of Windsor and Mrs. Simpson over to head a parade of one million lovers across the United States, timed to hit each city as *Parnell* opened, but much to the anguish of the Metro exploitation division, the company's executives finally decided that it would be a little too ostentatious, and if there is anything the film industry abhors, it is ostentatious advertising.

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**R**IDDING the screen of loud dialogue is not just a matter of doing away with unnecessary noise. The easiest way to make a player act naturally is to make him talk naturally. It is hard for a player not to create the impression that he is the person he is playing if he talks as we would expect the person to talk.

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**M**ENTAL MEANDERINGS: Let us hope our radio announcers heard the former King Edward, in his farewell broadcast, pronounce "parliament" as if there were no i in it. . . . Thinking of suing Jim Smith for alienating the affections of our dog. Jim is the veterinary who ministers to dogs and cats at the hospital which uses our advertising columns, and when our dog has to go there for any ailment, she wiggles all over as the car approaches the place, raises a row when she gets there, dashes in and does not calm down until she is in Jim's arms. He's that way with all dogs. . . . Boy, five or six years old, paused in front of me coming out of afternoon showing of *Tarzan Escapes* at Four Star Theatre, looked up at his companion and announced, "Now I'm going to spend my two dollars on ice cream and cake." . . . A long time ago I was a landed proprietor; had two pigs, Marguerite and Natalie, cute when they were little; followed me everywhere, but eventually grew gross and I gave them away. . . . Memories: Attending what probably was the most distinguished gala night in the history of the Opera House, Paris; coasting as a boy down a steep hill dotted with stumps of trees sticking up through the snow; moon

over the Mediterranean as viewed from Casino Terrace, Monte Carlo; high stone walls enclosing vegetable gardens on one of the Azore islands; first meeting Rupert Hughes nearly forty years ago, at Maria's, a below-the-sidewalk restaurant, New York; riding a one-gaited horse at Livingston, Montana, that either would run at top speed or stand still; K.C.B. excited about sport of spearing fish, getting deathly ill when he speared one in the belly; crossing the Atlantic on the *Mauretania*, captain reporting it as the roughest voyage in his forty years of crossings. . . . Can't remember it, of course, but when I was a very young baby our big Newfoundland dog, finding me for a moment unattended in the yard, took me under the house and deposited me among her puppies; perhaps explains my love of dogs. . . . Trouble with a lot of picture critics is they seem to consider their criticisms of more importance than the things criticized; particularly true of New York reviewers.

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**O**NE of the funniest things you hear on a motion picture lot is that the public will not accept this or that player in anything but a certain kind of role. In other words, no matter how entertaining the player makes his different characterizations, the public will refuse to be entertained by them. The film industry will be in a tough spot when the public refuses to be entertained by entertainment.

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**O**N page fourteen of this issue you will find an interesting letter from one of the many high schools which use the SPECTATOR as an aid in the study of Motion Picture Appreciation. (I would suggest you turn to it now and read it before reading further here). I agree with everything the four young women claim with such determination in every line of their letter. I charge myself with a lack of ability to explain my views clearly enough to enable every SPECTATOR reader to get the meaning of everything I write. When I say that the screen is not an acting art, I have in mind the projected acting with which the stage appeals to its audience. If a stage actor were completely natural, his voice in an intimate up-stage scene would not reach as far as the footlights. In the case of the screen an actor's faint whisper in the deep background can be heard by the occupants of the back row in the biggest theatres. The stage player *acts*; the screen player *must be the character he plays*, he must *feel* it, not *act* it; therefore I maintain the screen is not an *acting* art.

**A**S to the second charge the young people bring against me—"You say watching a movie should not require any mental effort"—I mean just that, but I have not made clear to my four critics what I mean, even though I have explained it often enough to bore longtime readers of the SPECTATOR. True cinema has the same appeal as music—direct to the emotions and without asking the cooperation of the intellect. If that means that real motion pictures would appeal only to morons, then morons would be the only ones composing a symphony concert audience. Talkies appeal to the intellect. I advocate a greater use of pure screen technique in the making of motion pictures because I believe emotional appeal has greater box-office value than intellectual appeal. As I wrote recently, be-

cause we have intellects is no reason why we should wish to exercise them always; because we have legs is no reason why we should run up and down the aisles of the theatre while a motion picture was being shown.

**B**UT there is one thing for which I wish to thank the Hamden High School: I am going to write a book, *Screen Entertainment: Its Psychological Aspect*, to set forth my views without being cramped by space limitations into leaving in doubt just what I mean by this or that argument. Recently I have added Allardyce Nicholl's *Film and Theatre*, and Pudovkin's *Film Technique* to the list of such works I have read. They, like so many others, treat comprehensively and excellently the making of motion pictures, but have nothing to say about the audience which sees the pictures after they are made. I maintain the audience should come first, that we should consider what would please it most and that our findings should govern the making of screen entertainment. That, at all events, will be the theme of *Screen Entertainment*. From time to time chapters as I write them will appear in the SPECTATOR. I think it was quite bright of me to figure out the labor-saving device of doing my SPECTATOR job and writing a book simultaneously. I promise the Hamden High School if it reads the book it may not agree with all my views, but at least it will understand what the views are. And if the four young women feel impelled to write me again, which I hope they will, will they please slip a new ribbon into their typewriter?

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**P**APERS report that never before in the history of the country has there been such demand for babies for adoption. One organization in Texas reports it has received two thousand applications from would-be parents without being able to fill one. There is a theme there for a great motion picture story.

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**A**PPARENTLY I missed the most interesting and arresting feature of the Adolph Zukor dinner and broadcast. In *Daily Variety* I read next morning that among those present were "Ernst and Mrs. Lubitsch in blue crepe, blue sandals and mink coat." The night was cold and if I had seen Ernst I would have advised him to kick off his sandals and get something warm on his feet. I am sure, though, that he must have looked cute, with just a touch of blue crepe falling below the edge of his mink coat. I commend Mrs. Lubitsch to something I recall having read in *Variety* on a former occasion when it reported a social function: "Kay Johnson and her husband John Cromwell wrapped in sables." Nothing was said, of course, about what John wore on his feet, but it is safe to presume that a wife sufficiently solicitous about her husband's comfort to wrap him in sables before taking him out, would not permit him to romp around in sandals on a really cold evening. I read also: "Edward and Mrs. Arnold in black sheer and gray krimmer." I am not quite sure if it be ethical for a paper devoted exclusively to motion pictures to concern itself in the attire of its readers, but I must say I do not think Eddie Arnold could have looked his best in gray krimmer. Of course,

if the black sheer had been done in fluted piping, cut on the bevel and then purred two, I believe Eddie's figure would have been set off to good advantage. I am afraid I can not escape being personal to the point of my own possible embarrassment if I refer to Lloyd Nolan. He lives across the street from me and I may encounter him while my criticism still rankles; but when I read, "Lloyd and Mel Nolan in a dramatic red and white cape," I can not refrain from reminding my neighbor that the occasion was a purely social one and his action in wearing a dramatic cape to draw attention to the fact of his being a dramatic actor is carrying his commercial instincts a bit too far. I draw his attention to the better taste displayed by Leo Spitz—"Leo and Mrs. Spitz in black net and chinchilla wrap with orchid corsage." I am sorry I did not see Leo. He must have been quite a sight. Even though I kept my eyes open, I seem to have missed all the most fascinating spectacles of the occasion. For instance: "Purnell Pratt and his wife in black satin with silver fox cape." As I dressed for the event I rather fancied myself, but even white tie and tails were badly handicapped in competition with the manner in which Ernst, Leo and the others were dolled up.

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**T**HE only flaw I could find in *Rembrandt* when I viewed it a second time, was the mechanical laughter that greeted the last of Laughton's philosophical speeches which distinguish the picture. Laughton is engulfed by a gay company of aristocrats and carried into an inn; when called upon for a toast he voices some thoughts on the text, "All is vanity." He is serious—never more serious in his life—yet his speech is spaced with loud laughter its content scarcely would cause and in which no cinema audience would feel like joining. We fairly can see the hand of the director being raised as a signal to the party to start laughing and lowering when it is to stop. We see the same thing in many pictures to remind us that the screen has not outgrown all its childish habits—groups of persons laughing uproariously at something which in real life would cause them only to smile, starting together and ending together until it is obvious it is done on signal. In staging such scenes directors should grade both the volume and the duration of the laughter by the laugh-provoking quality in what causes it.

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**R**EMEMBER Reginald Gardiner in *Born to Dance*? He is the man who made such a hit with his pantomimic interpretation of an orchestra leader at work. Apparently he has quite a variety of shots in his locker. *Time* says of him: "Actor Gardiner last year conquered Broadway by imitating—with a few simple but compelling gestures, an appropriate word or sound and the expression of his amazingly mobile face—such improbable objects as a French train, a dirigible, ugly wall paper. To these sensitively communicated ideographs, Mimic Gardiner has now added a lighthouse (by revolving his body and then suddenly opening his eyes and mouth very wide and hissing slightly when he faces the audience) and a buoy (by crouching, wobbling drunkenly, looking seasick and giving off a bilious bell sound)". Gardiner is coming here

to do more pictures. The art he has mastered is the purest kind of cinema, a fact of which Hollywood is delightfully oblivious. Six or eight years ago the film barons were given an opportunity to see Jimmy Savo on the screen and recognize his amazing talents as a pantomimist. I hailed him as a coming picture star, thereby inferentially crediting picture producers with picture wisdom, but Savo's first screen appearance constitutes his entire screen career. Now I wonder what is going to happen to Gardiner. Perhaps before the Shakespearean cycle finally expires he will play Hamlet with gestures. That an artist can carry a long role without talking has not occurred to Hollywood since sound came to the screen.

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**P**ARAMOUNT has brought Leopold Stokowski back to Hollywood. The brilliant conductor's contributions to *Big Broadcast* made such a hit with audiences that Paramount is flirting with the idea of making him the chief feature in a production written around a symphony orchestra. If Adolph Zukor entertains at Christmas dinner and all his guests rave about the excellence of the turkey dressing, he scarcely will invite the same guests to another dinner and offer dressing as the main dish. It was not the Stokowski music as such which appealed to *Broadcast* audiences; it was the fascinating manner in which his eloquent hands coaxed the music out of the instruments. Symphonic music is not commercial screen fare. I am not saying a picture with the conductor as its main feature would not be successful, but if I were in Paramount's place I would not bank too heavily on Stokowski's hands being strong enough to support an entire production.

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**A**NORWEGIAN tells me Sonja Henie's family name is pronounced "henny" not "hy-nie", as we hear it pronounced so generally in Hollywood.

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**D**ARRYL ZANUCK, the papers tell us, is going to follow *Lloyds of London* with *The Bank of England*, *The House of Morgan* and other purely material themes made into motion pictures. If he is going into the business of fictionizing businesses, I would like to suggest a company whose history should inspire a scenarist. I think it was something like three hundred years ago that there was organized in London "The Company of Gentlemen and Adventurers Trading Into Hudson's Bay." A royal charter was granted it. Today it is the Hudson's Bay Company, the oldest incorporated business concern in the world, the greatest dealer in furs, its history an epic of adventure and heroism. Extending into the Arctic Circle are its stores to which Indians and Esquimaux bring pelts to exchange for things they want from the outside world. The story of the Hudson's Bay Company could be made into a dramatic picture with a background of limitless scenic possibilities.

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**T**HE failure of *As You Like It* to do satisfactory business at the Four Star Theatre was not due altogether to lack of entertaining qualities in the attraction. During the run many people turned away from the box-office when they learned the picture was made from a Shakespearean play. The SPECTATOR always has contended that Shakespeare is not box-office. The public wants action, not literature, on the screen.

## Some Late Previews

### Magnificent Accomplishment

**GREEN LIGHT**, A Cosmopolitan Production for First National. Executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Henry Blanke; directed by Frank Borzage; A Frank Borzage production; screen play by Milton Krims; from the novel by Lloyd C. Douglas; photography by Byron Haskins, A. S. C.; film editor, James Gibbons; art director, Max Parker; assistant director, Lew Borzage; gowns by Orry-Kelly; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; music by Max Steiner. Cast: Errol Flynn, Anita Louise, Margaret Lindsay, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Walter Abel, Henry O'Neill, Spring Byington, Erin O'Brien-Moore, Henry Kolker, Pierre Watkin, Granville Bates, Russell Simpson, Myrtle Stedman, St. Luke's Choristers.

**O**CCASIONALLY I see a picture like this one, one whose perfections make me just part of the audience and which offers nothing to remind me I am there to criticize it. Criticisms are inspired by imperfections. *The Green Light* has none. Perhaps I can sum up my opinion of it by repeating what I said to Hal Wallis after the preview: that if I had produced all the pictures I have seen in the last twelve months, I would be prouder of having produced *The Green Light* than of having been responsible for any of the others. Beyond that, I scarcely know what to write. I find myself in the position I am in when I tell my wife I saw Mrs. So-and-So and that she was dressed beautifully; I am asked what Mrs. So-and-So had on, a question I can not answer. All I can remember is the impression she gave me, one of complete perfection in cut, fit and color, no detail taking precedence in attracting my attention.

*The Green Light* is a harmonious emotional symphony, a perfect blending of all its elements, an ennobling theme consistently developed, acting that never suggests the actor, direction that is inspired, a production of dignity and beauty, photography of the greatest artistic merit. I saw it last night. This morning as I write its spell is still on me, refusing to let me remember another picture with which to compare it. It is a magnificent accomplishment, a formidable contestant for the award as the best picture of 1937.

**M**ILTON KRIM'S screen play is an inspired bit of writing. Frank Borzage was given a script which enabled him to screen a story with a deeply spiritual theme and still give us a motion picture with all the elements of widespread popularity. *The Green Light* really is a sermon on the wisdom of right living, teaching us to be ready to go forward when the green light signifies a clear road ahead after we have been brought to a stop by the red light of adversity. With great dignity and compelling power Borzage has developed the spiritual values of the theme to make the picture both inspirational and entertaining. Only superlatives will do justice to the performances of the carefully chosen cast, each member of which performs with such complete conviction we can imagine no one else playing the part. Margaret Lindsay is outstanding even with such stiff competition, giving a sensitive, intelligent and moving performance. Errol Flynn carries the leading role. Walter Abel gives us what appeals to me as the finest characterization he has

contributed to the screen. He is an admirable actor.

Sir Cedric Hardwicke carries the chief spiritual burden of the story, his being the part that brings out the philosophy upon which the theme is based. "Magnificent" is the only term which can be applied to his performance. Anita Louise is sympathetic in her role opposite Flynn. Henry O'Neill has one of the leading parts which he handles with his usual skill. Henry Kolker, Pierre Watkin and Russell Simpson also stand out. I was glad to see Simpson again. He is one of the too-large army of sterling actors who have served Hollywood well only to be rewarded with present day neglect. Spring Byington is seen but briefly, but not too briefly to make her presence felt.

**T**HE esthetic appeal of the picture is strengthened by the musical treatment accorded it. I have contended always that music should serve only as a background for a picture, as an accompaniment of which we are aware only subconsciously. Here we have such treatment—or so I, for one, found it. I recall now having noticed the presence of music in a few places, but I do not know if the score is continuous. The picture as a whole was designed to keep the attention of the audience on the story as it develops; it so kept my attention at all times, and the music played a big part in keeping me emotionally in tune with the theme of the story. That is a tribute to the excellence of the score composed and arranged by Max Steiner and brought to the screen under the direction of Leo Forbstein.

The outstanding feature of Frank Borzage's direction is the evenness, smoothness and steady forward flow in the telling of the story. No distractions are offered us, no scene is stressed as being more important than any of the others; the players read their lines quietly, with full regard for their significance as parts of conversations of interest only to the persons engaged in them and not intended for the audience. A sequence in an operation room of a hospital is made impressive by the brisk actions and low voices of those appearing in it. It has that quality all screen scenes should strive for: it makes us instinctively feel it is authentic, that we are looking at real surgeons and nurses at work. *The Green Light* is a picture that rings true.

## Pommer, Plus Howard

**FIRE OVER ENGLAND**, London Film production. Alexander Korda presenting, for United Artists release. An Erich Pommer production. Directed by William K. Howard; based on novel by A. E. W. Mason; screen play by Clemence Dane and Sergei Nolbandov; features Flora Robson, Laurence Olivier, Leslie Banks, Vivien Leigh; Tamara Desni, Raymond Massey, Morton Selton; photographed by James Wong Howe; film editor, John Dennis; costumes, Rene Hubert; art director, Meersen. Supporting cast: Henry Oscar, Lawrence Hanray, Roy Russell, Howard Douglas, Cecil Mainwaring, Francis De Wolfe, Graham Cheswright, George Thirlwell, A. Corney Grain, Herbert Lomas, Bobby Newton, Donald Calthrop, Charles Carson, Lyn Harding, Robert Rendell. Running time, 90 minutes.

**A** Queen Elizabeth who can be both queen and woman is the portrait Flora Robson presents in this Erich Pommer production for London Films. Every one of us who has yawned behind history books at school must have

in his mind some sort of a Queen Elizabeth of his own. I believe Miss Robson's queen will come nearer matching most conceptions than any other previously offered us on stage or screen. It is quiet, thoughtful, sympathetic, but still regal, dignified and dominant. Even if *Fire Over England* did not have much more to recommend it, the characterization of the queen in itself would make it worthwhile. But it has much more.

It has the direction of William K. Howard, Pommer's choice to handle the biggest British production since *Nine Days a Queen*. Pommer, whose record rates him as one of the half dozen greatest producers in the world, needed a director of Bill Howard's calibre to realize on the screen all the possibilities of story material so rich in color and deed. Bill, however, faced a fundamental handicap in making a picture that would appeal as readily to American audiences as to those of England—the difficulty of focusing the attention of the audience at the outset on the essential feature of the story, a difficulty for which the star system is responsible and which will persist until American audiences become as familiar with English players as they are with our widely exploited home talent.

**W**ITH Greta Garbo and Ronald Colman in the leading parts, our attention would have centered on them the instant they made their first appearances; we would have known the story concerned them principally and even trivial incidents in their opening scenes would be implanted in our memories to give added meaning to later scenes. *Fire Over England* shows us faces unfamiliar to American audiences. We are not aware at the outset what players are to command our chief attention, which ones are most to be concerned in the drama to be unfolded. For this reason the story drags in the early sequences, is somewhat confusing, not by virtue of its lack of clarity, but because there is nothing definite to direct our attention.

But when Flora Robson and Laurence Olivier gradually grow in stature, when their admirable acting makes us realize the story concerns them chiefly, everything else falls into place and we are treated to a gripping drama of international import told against a glamorous background and expressed in terms of complete simplicity. We are not looking at history; we are looking at it being made. The weakness of the opening becomes the strength of what follows, for our unfamiliarity with its people as individuals in real life makes us more readily accept them as the persons they play. Howard interprets British history in terms of America's Main street, thus establishing the wisdom of Pommer's action in selecting him to direct the production.

**K**ORDA'S purse apparently was wide open while Pommer was producing. Everything is done on a lavish scale as befitted a story dealing with royalty and nations at war. But in essence it is a simple story of a heroic young man and a woman who is no less a woman because she is a queen. The personal element is not lost sight of even when stirring history-making deeds are being enacted. When flaming British ships set sail to meet the mighty Spanish Armada and set fire to the troopships of Philip, it is not the fate of England we tremble for. Our fears

and hopes go with the young man who leads the flaming fleet into the far-flung line of the advancing enemy.

Howard's direction is masterly throughout, as telling in intimate scenes as in his handling of great mass effects. His people are made human by the simple expedient of reading their lines in easy conversational tones instead of declaiming them to remind us they are actors. It is direction which draws us into the drama, which does not keep us at a distance and make us aloof spectators of it. Equally at home is Howard with dynamic action scenes and tenderly romantic ones. A feature of the direction is its lack of effort, of striving to achieve effect. When King Philip condemns Olivier to death, it is done quietly, unemotionally; and the young man's reaction is in the same mood. When the condemned man is shown how to escape there is no display of emotion. But when he makes his escape, there is some slam-bang action, sword play, excitement befitting the action as lack of excitement fitted the action which led up to it.

An outstanding feature of the production is the superb camera work of James Wong Howe of Hollywood. Visually the picture is one of the most beautiful ever brought to the screen.

## In Every Way Notable

**BLACK LEGION**, A Warner Bros. Picture. Executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Robert Lord; directed by Archie L. Mayo; assistant director, Jack Sullivan; screen play by Abem Finkel and William Wister Haines; original story by Robert Lord; photography by George Barnes, ASC; film editor, Owen Marks; art director, Robert Haas; gowns by Milo Anderson. Cast: Humphrey Bogart, Dick Foran, Erin O'Brien-Moore, Ann Sheridan, Robert Barrat, Helen Flint, Joseph Sawyer, Clifford Soubier, Alonzo Price, Paul Harvey, Dickie Jones, Samuel Hinds, Addison Richards, Eddie Acuff, Dorothy Vaughan, John Litel, Henry Brandon, Charles Halton, Pat C. Flick, Francis Sayles, Paul Stanton, Harry Hayden, Egon Brecher.

**POWERFUL** propaganda film, a dramatic indictment of social fanaticism, violent industrial unrest depicted graphically to teach the wisdom of industrial peace, *Black Legion* comes to the screen as one of the most consistently unfolded dramas ever offered the public. It is a photograph of a page of Michigan history, depicting the lawlessness of the hooded horde that imagined grievances and sought to right them by a series of crimes which reached as far as murder. The feature of the production that impressed me most was the downright cleverness of it, cleverness in writing, directing and acting. Opening on industrial peace and domestic happiness, it builds on an ever ascending scale through pulsating drama to stark tragedy. It is an uncomprising document, a factual record of things that happened, adorned with fiction only to give it personal application and focus our attention on the intimate human element. It succeeds so well that it is engrossing from the first fade-in to the final fade-out.

Robert Lord wrote the original story and produced the picture. To him goes credit for a dual job brilliantly performed. Finkel and Haines provided a screen play of outstanding dramatic strength. With uncanny skill the theme of the story is developed, its motivating premise planted so plausibly we see merit in it, almost agree that the workmen in the great industrial plant in which the story so impressively opens are justified in their endeavor

to make America safe for Americans and to protect their jobs against their usurpation by foreigners. But gradually we recognize the distortion in the basically self-preservation views of the leaders of the movement, and the criminality in the road they take to achieve their ends finally chills us by its ruthlessness and horror.

**ARCHIE MAYO'S** direction is brilliant. Here he has no stage play to translate literally as he had in *Petrified Forest*. He was given a *Black Legion* script richer in cinematic values. In many of the most impressive scenes not a word is spoken, and in others the dialogue is reduced to a minimum to permit the camera to carry the chief burden in advancing the story. The script recognizes, too, that what is said derives its values from the reaction of the listener, not from the lip movement of the speaker, consequently the camera is kept on the listener.

In the closing sequence, however, what the judge says is of paramount importance. He has presided at the trial of the legionaires; they have been convicted of murder, their story is ended and they no longer are of interest to us. Our attention is on the judge, in the person of Samuel Hinds, who impressively fumigates the murky atmosphere the story has developed, his address prior to inflicting sentence being a sermon on true Americanism so sound fundamentally, so well written and so eloquently delivered that it becomes one of the great moments in recent screen history. And as what he is saying is the matter of chief interest, the camera is on him all the time he is speaking.

**HUMPHREY BOGART** plays the leading role. No previous performance he has given quite prepared me for the compelling power, the dramatic intensity that characterizes his interpretation of the unintelligent weakling whom we first see as a happy husband and father and leave as a murderer condemned to life imprisonment. It is a brilliant example of a player losing himself completely in the drama of his role, his hands, his eyes, his mouth registering the depth of his emotion more graphically than it could be expressed in speech. A pleasant looking fellow in his first congenial domestic scenes, his face becomes positively repulsive when we see him as the cowering murderer.

Bogart's wife is played by Erin O'Brien-Moore. Under Mayo's intelligent and sympathetic direction this young woman gives a magnificent performance, restrained yet intense, one that will melt the hearts of the most stony-hearted audience. Ann Sheridan also registers strongly. It is the first time I have seen her, but the one experience is enough to warrant my prediction that a few more such roles will gain her a vast army of admirers. Dick Foran is another who distinguishes himself. To his pleasing personality, handsome stalwartness, he adds real acting skill. Joseph Sawyer plays one of those villainous roles he makes so chillingly impressive. I would like to meet him just to dissipate the hatred I bear him.

The cast is a long one. There is not a weak spot in it. The production is complete, the photography of George Barnes up to the high standard he long since has established.



## Mr. Arliss and One Other

MAN OF AFFAIRS, a Gaumont-British production, starring George Arliss. Directed by Herbert Mason. (Complete credits unavailable due to failure of press material to reach Hollywood in time and the shipment of the film to San Francisco directly after it was shown to the editor of the Spectator.)

**T**HE usual thing to say about a George Arliss picture is that the star plays himself again. I believe I have said it myself. In *Man of Affairs* the man is two people, and as Arliss manifestly can not play himself twice in one picture, one of the men must be someone else. If this Gaumont-British production is released hereabouts, you will find it among the worthwhile ones, quite the best in which the English actor has appeared in a long time. There is some merit in the claim that on the screen Arliss generally plays himself. He is a man of distinction and strong personality. On the stage we accepted him more readily as the person he played, as the long runs of his plays and his widely spaced appearances in different roles gave us little opportunity to become acquainted with him as a man.

The screen has brought us into greater intimacy with Arliss, the man; he has appeared in so many pictures we have become acquainted with him as an individual with a personality so strong it dominates his characterizations. That he is an accomplished screen actor no one can deny. It is his very mastery of his art that makes us charge him with playing himself; he impresses us so strongly in each of his different roles that our memory of one of his characterizations carries over to the next, each of his mannerisms, which his more infrequent appearances on the stage gave us an opportunity to forget, being kept fresh in our minds by virtue of his more frequent screen appearances.

**B**UT the charge that he always plays Arliss can not stand up in face of his enactment of two such widely diversified roles as he plays in his latest picture, in one an obdurate ass, in the other a gay adventurer, the parts being made reasonable by the fact that the pair are twins. Meticulous criticism might suggest the improbability of such an ass becoming foreign minister of Great Britain, but no one can challenge the authenticity of his gay adventurer. In neither characterization is there any trace of the other; anything to remind us that one man is playing both parts. I can recall no other dual roles carried through with such conviction. Arliss is both the menace and the hero, and as each his performance is an example of intelligent and finished acting.

On the whole *A Man of Affairs* is a picture well worth seeing. Gaumont-British has given it a handsome setting and the new faces it presents come to us as a refreshing interlude in the endless parade of familiar faces which flit from one to another of Hollywood's productions. It suggests there is merit in the Russian theory that the screen can get farther by presenting new people than by constantly showing the same ones in many different parts. For instance, never before on the screen have I seen the man who plays the prime minister in *A Man of Affairs*, consequently to me he is the prime minister, not an actor. It would have been harder for me to accept him if previously I had seen him as a drunken fish peddler or a dig-

nified archbishop. Incidentally, the actor's general resemblance to Stanley Baldwin, England's prime minister, helps to make me more readily accept him as the statesman he plays.

The story of the British picture is an interesting one, an entertaining mixture of gaiety, romance and drama. Herbert Mason's direction has much to recommend it.

## Eddie Horton and Others

LET'S MAKE A MILLION, Paramount. Produced by Harold Hurley; directed by Ray McCarey; assistant director, Roland Asher; screen play, Robert Yost and Manuel Seff; based on a story by Lawrence Pohle and Thomas Ahearn; sound, Walter Oberst and Don Johnson; film editor, Doane Harrison; art directors, Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; photographed by Karl Struss, A.S.C.; musical direction, Boris Morros; interior decorations by A. E. Freudeman. Cast: Edward Everett Horton, Charlotte Winters, Porter Hall, J. M. Kerrigan, Margaret Seddon, Margaret McWade, Purnell Pratt, Irving Bacon, Ivan Miller, Stanley Andrews, Baldwin Cooke, Harry Bernard, Eddie Dunn, the "Pixilated" Sisters.

**B**ECAUSE Edward Everett Horton is an accomplished actor, he is highly amusing in deft roles. He was unfortunate to get such roles early in his career and did them so well he constantly is cast in them. In *Let's Make a Million* Paramount proved itself adventuresome. It allowed Harold Hurley to present Horton as a sane person, a positive character, not a negative nitwit. Of course, the Horton brand of comedy is not missing. It is there in large quantities, but it serves as a background for his characterization and is not the dominant quality. In each of his scenes Horton reveals what a consummate artist he is as he weaves a thread of restrained comedy through the earnest purpose of his actions.

Robert Yost and Manuel Seff provided an excellent film play which Ray McCarey, by discriminating and expert direction, has brought to the screen as a tidy little comedy that will give general satisfaction. It moves along briskly, sprinkling laughs as it goes, but has its serious moments. The story has to do with a fake oil well promotion, Purnell Pratt and Porter Hall being the fakirs who scoop up Horton and let him down, only later to get their come-upperance when Eddie swings into action as the revenger of his hometown's despoiling. Charlotte Winters, new to me, carries the romantic interest with the star. Good looks, charming personality, acting ability are her possessions which the screen can use to its advantage. J. M. Kerrigan, always excellent, contributes an outstanding performance. We have the "pixilated" sisters again, and Hurley wisely refrains from presenting them in an imitation of their *Mr. Deeds* success. The dear old things almost amount to a menace.

In casting, production and photography, *Let's Make a Million* has no apologies to offer. It is a thoroughly enjoyable, intelligently made comedy.

## Serves As An Example

JOIN THE MARINES, Republic release of Nat Levine production. Executive producer, Albert E. Levoy; associate producer, Joseph Krumgold; directed by Ralph Staub; screen play by Joseph Krumgold and Olive Cooper; original story by Karl Brown; photographed by Ernest Miller; film editors, Ernest Nims and Lester Orlebeck; musical supervision, Harry Grey. Cast: Paul Kelly, June Travis, Purnell Pratt, Reginald Denny, Warren Hymer, Irving Pichel, Sterling Holloway, Ray Corrigan, John Holland, Carleton

Young, John Sheehan, Arthur Hoyt, Richard Beach, Howard Hickman, Val Duran, Landers Stevens. Running time; 68 mins.

**D**ESPITE the completeness of its production staff—Nat Levine, producer; Albert E. Levoy, executive producer; Joseph Krumgold, associate producer—this one will appeal only to the most amiable and indulgent audience. One readily can see that Karl Brown's original was rich enough in human interest and pictorial sweep to enable a satisfactory picture to be made from it, but the screen play and direction failed to develop the story's values. It is a class B production, born without aspirations to reach even the knees of the big-theatre gods; and probably has enough strength to support the weak end of a dual bill, but, as I have written before, I have seen no class B picture whose story could not have been made into a class A picture by the application of screen intelligence.

In the opening sequence of *Join the Marines* June Travis is presented as the attractive daughter of a Marine officer about to embark on a trans-Atlantic voyage. As she approaches the gangplank, bystanders block her way and there is a clamorous demand for information as to where she is going. Paul Kelly has preceded her to the gangplank; the commotion attracts his attention, and he pauses. June sees him and announces she is going abroad with him, rushes into his arms and kisses him, at the same time making it obvious that she has no idea who he is. It is not made clear why she does not display her ticket and go aboard without all the fuss. I know of no steamship rule which demands that every woman passenger must be accompanied by a man.

**W**HEN we view a motion picture we refuse to believe a thing could happen merely because we see it happen. We view a screen scene from either of two angles: that it could happen or that if it could happen, it would happen that way. The reduction of human beings to one-sixth their size, as was done in Metro's *Devil Doll*, we know by no possibility could happen, yet we are entertained by the fact of its happening because it interests us to see what the results of such a strange situation would be. Similarly, we are interested when we see fairies flying through the air in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. We know there are no such things as fairies, but it interests us to see what they would look like if they existed. It is a pleasing flight into the realm of fancy.

June's embarkation comes under neither head. Even though we see her acting upon the presumption that the ship's officials will not permit her to become a passenger until she kisses a strange young man, we refuse to believe such a thing would happen or that it would be worth looking at if it did happen. We would be willing to accept a still wilder expedition into the impossible: If by a fairy's wand June had been reduced to doll proportions and had hopped into Kelly's pocket after the establishment of some plausible reason why she could get aboard in no other way, we would have accepted the scene as an amusing conception and because it would have interested us to realize what it would look like if it really could happen.

As far as I am concerned, the only purpose *Join the Marines* serves is to suggest the thoughts set down above, and which I hope SPECTATOR readers will find interesting.

## Joneses Are Loud Speakers

**OFF TO THE RACES**, Twentieth Century-Fox. Directed by Frank R. Strayer; associate producer, Max Golden; original screen play by Robert Ellis and Helen Logan; based on the characters created by Katharine Kavanaugh; photography, Barney McGill, A. S. C.; art direction, Lewis Creber; assistant director, Sol Michaels; film editor, Alex Troffey; costumes, Herschel; sound, Bernard Fredericks and Harry M. Leonard; song, "Meet The Family" by L. Wolfe Gilbert and Felix Bernard; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Slim Summerville, Jed Prouty, Shirley Deane, Spring Byington, Russell Gleason, Kenneth Howell, George Ernest, June Carlson, Florence Roberts, Billy Mahan, Ann Gillis, Fred Toones, Chick Chandler, Ruth Gillette.

**T**HE Jones Family series of domestic comedies is beginning to slip, if we may judge from the tendency toward farce revealed in *Off to the Races*. It is evident that Century did not know what it offered for sale in the first of the series, what gave the pictures their box-office value. The public was ready for screen entertainment which allowed us to look at ourselves—pictures which showed us just an ordinary American family doing quite ordinary things, not important in essence, but important in the daily lives of the members of the family. The first of the Jones pictures which I saw was interesting entertainment because it was human, natural, believable, the people in it normal beings of the sort we rub elbows with every day. There is nothing of the heart-warming domestic spirit in *Off to the Races*.

Apparently under the impression the series needed jazzing up, the story introduces Uncle George, in the person of Slim Summerville, who moves in on the Jones family, installs his racehorse in the Jones garage, and permeates the picture with farcical aroma. The story lacks cleverness, not so much in the writing as in its interpretation. Slim's characterization, capable as his always are, dissipates the domestic atmosphere which distinguished the first of the series; exaggerations replace the entertaining normal incidents in the life of the family. And everything that happens could have happened normally if it had been presented in a normal manner. For one thing, nearly all the characters read their lines as if they were doing just that—reading lines, not conversing, and apparently being under the impression that the microphone was hard of hearing. In the intimacy of their bedroom Jed Prouty fairly shouted his lines at Spring Byington, his wife, and to demonstrate the fact that they could be heard by ears for which they are not intended, he raps on the wall and through it speaks in the same tone to people in next room. The theme of the stories in the series is built upon the assumption that we are taken into the home of an ordinary American family. *Off to the Races* fails to entertain us because it fails to make us believe it.

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I consider the SPECTATOR almost a necessity for libraries, schools, public relations groups—all those working with and for the moving pictures.—*Ina Roberts, Publicity Director, Cleveland Public Library.*

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Giving a Christmas bonus to the lower paid employees was good business on the part of the studios. It helps to lessen the dissatisfaction felt toward the head men who draw such fabulous pay checks.

## Warners Give Us Two

**MELODY FOR TWO**, Warners production and release. Bryan Foy, associate producer; directed by Louis King; screen play by George Bricker; adaptation by Luci Ward and Joseph K. Watson; from story by Richard Macaulay; production numbers directed by Robert Vreeland; assistant director, Carrol Sax; photographed by Arthur Todd; film editor, Jack Saper; dialogue director, Gene Lewis; art director, Esdras Hartley; musical direction, Leo F. Forbstein; music and lyrics by Harry Warren and Al Dubin, M. K. Jerome and Jack Scholl. Cast: James Melton, Patricia Ellis, Marie Wilson, Fred Keating, Dick Purcell, Winifred Shaw, Craig Reynolds, Charley Foy, Gordon Elliott, Eddie Anderson, Eddie Kane, Gordon Hart, Harry Hayden. Running time, 60 minutes.

**PENROD AND SAM**, Warners release of First National picture. Bryan Foy, associate producer; from story by Booth Tarkington; directed by William McGann; screen play by Lillie Hayward and Hugh Cummings; assistant director, Drew Ebersson; photographed by L. William O'Connell; film editor, Thomas Pratt; art director, Hugh Reticker; dialogue director, Hugh Cummings. Cast: Billy Mauch, Frank Craven, Spring Byington, Craig Reynolds, Harry Watson, Jackie Morrow, Philip Hurlic, Charles Halton, Bernice Pilot, Kenneth Harlan, Allan Davis, Si Wills, Billy Lechner, Billy Wolfstone, Jerry Madden, Robert Homans, Mildred Gover, George Billings, Jerry Tucker, Jack Cunningham, Don Hulbert, John Pirrone. Running time, 68 minutes.

**TWO** of Warners' It'll-Get-the-Money series of class B offerings were previewed on successive nights, which shows how busily Bryan Foy, their producer, keeps his grinders grinding. Class B product from all the studios is distinguished chiefly for speed and cheapness in production, neither of which is of any interest to those who eventually see the picture. The film industry as a whole has an opportunity greatly to increase its dividends by making its cheap pictures strong enough in entertainment values for each to bear the weight of a complete program without reliance on a dual bill mate. *Melody for Two* is scarcely strong enough to go it alone, although it has some good points, among them an attractive production, the singing of James Melton, Patricia Ellis and Winifred Shaw, and the comedy of Marie Wilson and Charles Foy. Again I rise to remark that her producers are not making the most of the natural talents of Marie, not developing the elfish quality which makes her so distinctive. She is a hit in this picture, but has no opportunity to display the quality that makes her unique. And now it looks as if the most is not being made of the comedy talents of Charles Foy. He is a clever young fellow who will register in a big way when he gets his chance, expert dancing being one of his assets.

The story of *Melody for Two* is set in an atmosphere lacking in general appeal. It deals with behind-the-scenes activities of dance orchestras, the menace being provided by an arranger. Non-musical members of audiences probably will wonder what an arranger does and why they have him around. Harry Warren, M. K. Jerome, Al Dubin and Jack Scholl provide music and lyrics that should become popular. The leading role, that of Melton, will not gain the complete sympathy of the audience. He is characterized as an unreasonable leader and singer with a too abundant estimate of his importance. However, if you drop in on *Melody for Two* you will get some return on your box-office investment.

**HAVING** to be elsewhere when *Penrod and Sam* was previewed, I delegated Paul Jacobs to pinch-hit for me.

Here is what he thinks of it:

How much or how little Mr. Beaton enjoyed the other half of this double review I do not know, but if his half proved disappointing I suggest he see *Penrod and Sam* by way of compensation. Bryan Foy's newest is family entertainment on a comprehensive scale. Perhaps Mr. Foy has finally taken heed of the SPECTATOR's oft repeated warnings; at any odds, *Penrod and Sam* is genuinely entertaining because of the rich warmth and down-to-earth boy psychology. Anyone who knows the workings of Young America's mind will relish every minute of it; and who among us does not remember his own gang and the magnificent plans it laid for capturing bandits?

The adaptation by Lillie Hayward and Hugh Cummings offers us a significant commentary on screen fundamentals. Although the story is changed from Tarkington's original and brought up to the minute by introducing the "G-man" idea, *Penrod and Sam* captures the mood of the original by weaving the story threads from the same homely, tolerant humor. The thematic current is identical with Tarkington's own; hence, regardless of surface changes, the story carries the same audience appeal. Recognition of this very significant truth makes William McGann's direction thoroughly pleasing.

Frank Craven is ideally cast as Mr. Schofield. His acting is consummate; never once, by the slightest gesture or inflection of voice, does he admit that a camera and microphone are responsible for his conduct; he is simply Penrod's dad. Spring Byington is completely lovable as Penrod's mother; her sweetness and compassion are beautifully blended, a type of role seldom made believable in Hollywood, where sticky sentiment so often passes for honest mother-love. As for the gang, the usual slight self-consciousness of inexperience mars the otherwise generally fine acting. There is one exception, and with it goes my vote for the best performance; Philip Hurlic's "Verman" is a junior masterpiece, the best kid portrayal this year. Competent editing by Thomas Pratt and sympathetic dialogue by Hugh Cummings make this First National offering uniformly excellent. In fact, *Penrod and Sam* comes under the category of a minor big hit.

## It Is Beautiful to Look At

**TRIAL DUST**, Paramount release. Produced by Harry Sherman; directed by Nate Watt; assistant directors, Harry Knight and D. M. Abrahams; original by Clarence E. Mulford; screen play and dialogue, Al Martin; film editor, Robert Warwick; sound, Earl Sitar; photographed by Archie Stout, A.S.C.; special effects, Mel Wolf; musical arrangements, Charles Bradshaw; wardrobe, Al Kennedy; male chorus directed by Billy Hamer; associate producer, Eugene Strong. Cast: William Boyd, James Ellison, George Hayes, Stephen Morris, Gwynne Shipman, Britt Wood, Dick Dickson, Al Bridge, Earl Askam, John Beach, Ted Adams, Tom Halligan, Emmett Daly, Dan Wolheim, George Chesboro, Robert Drew, Harold Daniels, Al St. John, Kenneth Harlan.

**ARCHIE STOUT'S** camera makes this production a pictorial treat. It brings us wide vistas of mountains and plains in a series of beautiful compositions artistically photographed, the visual attractiveness of the production being enough in itself to make it worth seeing. One feature of Harry Sherman's series of Westerns is the honesty of their production. He presents his players in the settings nature has reared, gives us generous numbers of ex-

pert riders, great herds of cattle, much action. In *Trail Dust* he gives us also more than usual of Jimmy Ellison's pleasant singing and a chorus of male voices which give the picture real musical value. Harry apparently regards results as of greater importance than his budget. Certainly *Trail Dust* shows no signs of financial skimping.

The story could have been better. There is much in it which is hard to follow. When I view a picture I seek entertainment, not mental exercise. When cowboys ride I want their destination and purpose to be obvious and to fit into the story without my concentrated mental cooperation. Here we have some goings-on, cowboys stalking other cowboys and shooting them down, without their story significance, their relation to other incidents, being clear. It can not be charged to my lack of attention as it is the business of a motion picture to hold my attention, not mine to hunt for the essential point of a scene. The story does not establish a mood and sustain it. Hard on the heels of the shooting of a cowboy comes an interlude of pleasant singing around a campfire. The story is too episodic, its action too spotted.

Nat Watt's direction is excellent throughout. Ellison reveals even more than in others of the series, the ingratiating personality and acting ability which are making him popular as a leading man. All the others in the cast acquit themselves satisfactorily.

## Being Fatherly with Norman

**WITHOUT WARNING**, Twentieth Century-Fox. Executive producer, Sol M. Wurtzel; directed by Norman Foster; screen play by Norman Foster; from an American magazine story by Philip Wylie; photography, Sidney Wagner, A.S.C.; art direction, Albert Hogsett; assistant director, Aaron Rosenberg; film editor, Louis Loeffler; costumes, Herschel; sound, G. P. Costello and Harry M. Leonard; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: J. Edward Bromberg, Betty Furness, John Howard Payne, Victor Kilian, Billy Burrud, Gavin Muir, Gloria Roy, Andrew Tombes, Ivan Lebedeff, John Eldredge, Julius Tannen, Paul McVey, Lelah Tyler, Lydia Knott.

**V**ERSATILITY to be admired is that of an actor who writes a screen play and directs it when it is made into a photoplay. I always have liked Norman Foster's acting. Never inspired, it always was dependable and sincere. His first job as a director is of the same order—not inspired, but dependable. He does things as they always have been done; as a writer, injecting in the veins of his script at the customary intervals the poison of "comedy relief," and as a director, putting it on the screen in the conventional manner. In his direction of the dialogue he aims all his speeches at the last row in the top gallery. As an actor he has had long training in playing a part as an actor should play it. In his first effort he directs a picture as an actor would direct it.

When I sat down to write this morning my intention was to make pleasant and conventional references to Norman's direction. At breakfast—a good breakfast, good appetite, my table in front of a wood fire cheerfully burning in the fireplace—I decided to cheer the young man on his new career by a number of hurrahs, but here in my big chair, my pad on my knee, I find my pen more honest than I am. Long trained in expressing what is in my mind rather than in writing according to my personal inclinations, I find it is doing Norman the greater favor of pointing out his initial and easily remedied weaknesses in

the hope that what there is of wisdom in my comments will be of help to him in his new career.

**P**RESERVATION of the mood of a story is essential to the success of a photoplay. *Without Warning* is a murder mystery. Murder is not a casual incident to be discussed in a matter-of-fact manner. The audience accepts it as the players present it, see in it only the dramatic intensity the players give evidence of feeling. When two players carry on a discussion obviously intended for no other ears, they speak in low tones even though the chances of their being overheard are slight. The tones reflect the depth of their feeling. All through his picture Norman's players do not modulate their voices to fit the mood of their scenes. They talk of clues casually, loudly, and with no more suggestion of importance in their words than they put in their conventional references to the most trivial happenings in the day's routine, thereby suggesting to the audience that murder stirs them no more than their anticipation of a pleasant horseback ride in the morning sun. And the audience can not be stirred by drama to a greater degree than the characters enacting it give evidence of being stirred.

Little fault can be found with Norman's direction of physical elements. He moves his characters expertly, groups them with due regard for the camera and keeps alive the feeling of suspense. Edward Bromberg, John Eldredge and Victor Kilian give the most natural performances. Betty Furness, Julius Tannen, John Howard Payne and Gloria Roy make a good impression. Ivan Lebedeff's performance is distinguished by intelligent reading of his lines. All the performances, however, would have been more effective if the direction of the dialogue had shown more regard for the mood of the story. The picture is mounted handsomely, Sidney Wagner's photography taking full advantage of the pictorial possibilities of the story's locale, Death Valley.

## Gabby But Good

**THE MIGHTY TREVE**, Universal picture and release. Directed by Lewis D. Collins; associate producer, Val Paul; from the story by Albert Payson Terhune; screen play by Albert R. Perkins, Marcus Goodrich and Charles Grayson; photographed by Jerome Ash; art director, Jack Otterson; associate, Loren Patrick; film editor, Philip Cahn; musical director, Charles Previn; sound supervisor, Homer G. Tasker. Cast: Noah Beery, Jr., Barbara Read, Samuel S. Hinds, Hobart Cavanaugh, Alma Kruger, Julian Rivero, Edmund Cobb, Erville Alderson, Guy Usher, Spencer Charters, Tuffy. Running time, 68 minutes.

*Reviewed by Paul Jacobs*

**D**OG lovers will swoon with pleasure over this revamped Terhune story by Albert R. Perkins, Marcus Goodrich and Charles Grayson. Universal has learned from its long experience in westerns the drawing power of magnificent locale. *The Mighty Treve* derives its strength from fundamentals—natural beauty, the flowing rhythm of massed bands of sheep, the sinister grace of a crouching puma, the devotion of a wonderful dog to a lovable boy. For his perception of these truths and their skilful application, Director Lewis D. Collins is deserving of thankful praise.

Competently handled in every department, *The Mighty Treve* is weak only in points that easily can be mended by re-editing. For example, Noah Beery, Jr., while searching for his dog, emits a coaxing whistle that couldn't possibly be heard at a hundred feet; it drew an immediate guffaw from the audience. There are several such oversights. But the photography of Jerome Ash and the scoring by Charles Previn are more than full compensation.

**B**EFORE I can praise the cast, I must make clear that "Treve," played by Tuffy, is the most beautiful and important event of the picture. Tuffy is far and away the best actor, the most delightful actor, and the most handsome actor. Noah, Jr., is splendidly cast and appealing, but his dialogue is repetitious and often boresome. This, through no fault of his own. Unquestionably, he is developing into an actor of distinction.

Barbara Read is winsome and immediately enlists the support of her audience by her sincerity. Samuel S. Hinds has long been a favorite of mine. His "Uncle Joel" is thoroughly believable, adding another fine performance to his long string of excellent portrayals. Strong support is added by Spencer Charters, Hobart Cavanaugh, and brief bits by Guy Usher, Erville Alderson, Edmund Cobb, Julian Rivero and Alma Kruger.

If you love dogs and revel in gorgeous scenery, *The Mighty Treve* was made for you. Clever man, Producer Val Paul.

## Metro Mystery Masterpiece

**UNDER COVER OF NIGHT**, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Directed by George B. Seitz; produced by Lucien Hubbard and Ned Marin; original story and screen play by Bertram Millhauser; musical score by Dr. William Axt; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Eddie Imazu and Edwin B. Willis; photographed by Charles Clarke, A.S.C.; film editor, Ben Lewis; assistant director, Tom Andre. Cast: Edmund Lowe, Florence Rice, Nat Pendleton, Henry Daniell, Sara Haden, Dean Jagger, Frank Reicher, Zeffie Tilbury, Henry Kolker, Marla Shelton, Theodore Von Eltz, Dorothy Peterson, Harry Davenport.

*Reviewed by Paul Jacobs*

**W**HEN Metro gets a really good story, mixes it with a thoroughly competent director and then adds a strong cast to its usual excellent production—the audience is in for guaranteed entertainment. *Under Cover of Night* is pungent action served up in a new way. Bertram Millhauser gives us a mystery distinctly different. Imagine, for example, letting the audience know all along who the killer is; conceive, if you can, of mystery without sinister glances or dire mutterings; a picture in which the murderer is presented as a logical, well-bred person who finds himself in circumstances from which there is no escaping the necessity for murder. In other words, *Under Cover of Night* is that rarest of all films, a story which justifies itself as it progresses.

George B. Seitz is largely responsible for the smooth rhythm which points up the dramatic peaks and amply sustains the intermediate action. Quite as important, his careful attention to histrionic detail is instrumental in the perfectly timed, forceful performances. Speaking of acting, Edmund Lowe has never given a better performance since his Sargeant Quirt. Florence Rice is corking as

the girl-interest, and Nat Pendleton gives forth his believable, good-natured stupidity.

Particularly fine are the characterizations of Sara Haden and Henry Daniell. Dean Jagger lends a pleasing virility and an entirely competent job. For the rest, troupers all, selection for excellence is absurd. They are all superb, from Frank Reicher to Harry Davenport.

Given the physical perfection expected of M.G.M., *Under Cover of Night* is a job well done. Congratulations to Lucien Hubbard and Ned Marin.

## Cinematic Pulse

*By Paul Jacobs*

**T**HE SPECTATOR often has pointed out that the presentation of the story is more important than its plot. By this is meant that the illusion of reality is more significant than the frame upon which it is woven. But even the thinnest of really good films are structurally sound underneath. *My Man Godfrey*, for example, while almost transparent, was rigidly adherent to the principles of *achievement* story form. Godfrey had a specific purpose, to make good as a butler. Throughout obstacles to this purpose were thrust in his path; the audience was never quite sure but that he would be dismissed summarily. Thus audience interest remained at high pitch. The plot was sound; the illusion skilfully done, strong in both departments, *Godfrey* was bound to be a successful picture. There are many dramatic and mechanical weaknesses I have noticed constantly and which, recognized and eliminated, would give us a more consistent series of good pictures. Let us glance at some of them.

One of the most common errors is that the narrative unity is destroyed by not making clear at the outset just what the purpose of the principal character is. In *Godfrey* we were shown this in the beginning. Thus, when the story body was launched, we knew exactly what to fear, what to hope for, and how slim our hero's chances were. The entire story revolved around this problem of the hero; we had a narrative unity upon which to fasten our emotional responses. We did not waste them on extraneous stuff.

**A** WEAKNESS which has cropped up since pictures went arty is that producers forget that a picture is interesting in proportion to what depends upon its problem. In the silents, pictures got down to rock-bottom; the hero usually had to save his life or that of the heroine. In many films today the problem is of little consequence to the audience. In *Godfrey*, the hero hits right at the heart of his audience when we learn that he is fighting to save his self-respect. His problem immediately became of genuine importance to every spectator, because self-respect is universally valued.

Perhaps the most common mistake is the producer's assumption that to please an audience, the picture must end happily. Many films are made preposterous by literally wrenching the movement out of its obviously natural course in order to achieve the "lived happily ever after." What the audience really wants and all that it demands is that justice be done. Right must triumph, the

wicked must fail and be punished. It is true enough that most audiences prefer a happy outcome, but it does not prefer an outcome that is palpably phoney.

And this brings us to still another general fault. The really good plot is inexorably welded by its own logic. The progression of events must be inevitable. Each successive action must grow out of its predecessor. Many films are carried forward on haphazard movements. Life itself is haphazard, but the story must be cohesive, a sort of concentrate of life. The final scene of every good film will be the natural, almost inevitable result of the first scene in the beginning.

**T**HIS point, in turn, brings up another. Filmic balance is many times upset by playing up the length and interest of one particular scene or incident, thus overshadowing the problem, or plot interest. The ultimate purpose of any and every scene, incident, actor, gesture, setting, etc., is to further the story movement, or to enhance its illusion of reality. By indulging directorial whim or the thoughtless demand of an actor, many stories lose their dramatic integrity and balance.

The point just discussed is sufficiently vital to be relevant even in the mechanics of suspense. That is, false suspense is often unwittingly introduced by intensifying the interest in minor scenes, which, when the excitement is over, leaves the audience right back where it was before. Suspense, like every other device of the story, must further the movement. This lack of dramatic focus can induce still another form of artificial suspense: that of tenseness on the part of the audience through inability sharply to aim or focus its interest. From the foregoing, we can see that suspense proper must lie in the central movement, and grow from the actual arrangement of action.

**T**AKING the total of these points, the immediate inference that may logically be drawn is that the story must have a single predominating problem, about which the entire effect is directed. It is thus apparent that "comedy relief" is deleterious, as it destroys the singleness of effect, unless the comedy is actually relevant to the threads of the problem.

It is also obvious that mass-movement and "epic" pictures often fail, not because the subject matter treated is uninteresting to an audience, but because the method of treatment is faulty; hardly ever is the audience able to pick out a single, all-pervading human problem, follow it uninterruptedly, treat it personally, as though it were its own problem, and carry away with it a definite emotional impression.

**Q**UITE a meticulously ethical writer is Frederick Stone. His brilliantly written review of *The Plough and the Stars*, which appeared in the last SPECTATOR, was too long for our space requirements in the form in which it reached me and I was forced to delete a long quotation from a recent book. From Palm Springs Fred writes me: "Incidentally, there is something which I should like to see corrected. When in my article I said 'short shots of powerful emphasis (the battle scenes) and long shots con-

taining material of less significance (the homely sequences), etc.," I was referring to a quotation out of Allardyce Nicoll's *Film and Theatre*, and felt free to use his very words since they referred to my quotation of them in the same article, but which quotation was omitted when my article appeared in print. Although this will probably go unnoticed, it does nevertheless look like rank plagiarism, and for the sake of the record I should like you to make some remark about this in your Easy Chair department."

## Readers Write

### I Stand Condemned

December 8, 1936

Dear Sir:

We have read your article "From the Editor's Easy Chair" which appeared in the September issue of the HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR, and we disagree violently with you on several points.

Firstly, we believe, contrary to your statement that acting has no place on the screen, that the cinema could not be a success without good acting. You contend that true "movies" should consist only of pantomime, eliminating audible dialogue. It is well known that the art of pantomime is by far the most difficult form of acting. Charles Chaplin, whom you rate as the best example of a true motion picture actor and a real box-office success, is conceded to be one of the top rank actors and artists of the world. You also say that his pictures come the nearest to being "true cinema". And still you say that acting has no place on the screen.

Secondly, you say watching a movie should not require any mental effort, any intellect. Your conception of a perfect motion

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**FOR WARNER BROTHERS**

\*IN COLLABORATION

picture would appeal only to a moron, for just that type of person could enjoy a picture entirely void of anything to chew on.

Also we believe that the better films are appreciated by the average movie-goer. We consider ourselves a representative cross-section of the American motion picture audience, and we enjoy pictures that make us think far more than this silly, wishy-washy emotional stuff. For example, the records of the New Haven theaters show that the pictures which are held over by popular demand are for the most part of the intellectual type, such as *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *These Three*, and *The Magnificent Obsession*. These records also prove our contention that great classics and stage plays written for an intellectual audience in the first place can be adapted into beautiful successes.

This letter has been read to a high school class of thirty-five students, most of whom supported our views.—*Francis Allen, Barbara Male, Dorothy Ann Nelson, Shirley Huie. Hamden High School, Hamden, Connecticut.*

For comments on the above letter, see page four.

### Champions Class B Product

It is not uncommon now for some of the people in the picture industry to advocate the elimination of class B pictures and the double feature bills in theatres. I wonder if these people stop to think what would happen here in Hollywood if the smaller independents and class B pictures were not made. I have no way of knowing just how many thousands are employed in making this so-called inferior product, but I do know that there are many of our people employed in the industry who never get near a class A production set. I agree with the SPECTATOR in its contention that many of the lower grade pictures could be greatly improved at no additional cost by exercising ordinary common sense, but it will be a sad day for Hollywood if the time ever comes when we do away with the second rate pictures turned out by the major studios and those of the independent.—*Just an Extra.*

### It's the Point of View

... And it must rile you when, after roasting a picture good and plenty, you find that it is mopping up at the box-offices. I have in mind *Three Men on a Horse*, which Norbert Lusk tells us in this morning's *Times* is proving a great success in New York. You classified it as one of the year's worst pictures. How about it?—*J. R. D., Hollywood.*

*I want all pictures to make money and when one which I have criticized adversely "mops up" it appeals more to my sense of humor than to a feeling of disappointment. I do not criticize a picture from the box-office angle. There are plenty of trade papers ably doing that. My approach is from the standpoint of how good the picture under consideration could have been, how far it comes short of realizing its possibilities. I hope Three Men on a Horse is a great financial success, but I maintain it could have doubled whatever success it may have if it had been made intelligently. I consider it a bad picture, not in comparison with other pictures, but by its failure to realize all the entertainment values latent in its story material. Its theme is a solidly humorous one requiring the display of a keen sense of humor in its screen treatment. Instead, it comes to us as a noisy, blatant and superficial comedy, poorly written, wrongly cast and badly directed. But good luck to it!*

### Makes Himself Quite Clear

I have been notified my subscription to the SPECTATOR is expiring. I am glad to hear it. You may discontinue it. It is the most annoying paper I have ever read. Your calm assumption that you are qualified to estimate the values of motion pictures is tiresome to me. I could point out many instances in which you have betrayed a lack of the knowledge you profess to have.

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Your ego has run away with whatever brain you started with. You should confine yourself to writing about dogs and horses as you do so entertainingly in the current issue of the SPECTATOR.— —, *Hollywood.*

By a remarkable coincidence, the name signed to the above letter is that of a writer whose screen play I was forced to criticize adversely in a recent issue.—*W. B.*

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*Hollywood*

20  
CENTS

# S P E C T A T O R

Eleventh Year

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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Volume 11

MARCH 13, 1937

No. 25

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## ENTERTAINMENT

*What Is It—Why We Seek It—What  
We Demand of It*

*The Second of a Series of Special Articles  
by the Editor Dealing with the  
Fundamentals of Screen Art*

.... REVIEWED ....

MAYTIME \* \* \* HISTORY IS MADE AT NIGHT \* \* \* WHITE BONDAGE  
THAT I MAY LIVE \* \* \* TWENTY-THREE-AND-A-HALF-HOURS' LEAVE  
MARKED WOMAN \* \* \* CALL IT A DAY \* \* \* A FAMILY AFFAIR  
ESPIONAGE \* \* \* DEAD YESTERDAY \* \* \* MAN WHO FOUND HIMSELF

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THE SCREEN INDUSTRY CAN SERVE ITSELF BEST BY SERVING SCREEN ART MORE

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From the

# Editor's Easy Chair

(This is the second in a series of special articles by the Editor dealing with the fundamentals of screen art.)

**E**NTERTAINMENT is recreation. We seek it to meet the demand for relief from the mental and physical exactions of our daily pursuits, to freshen by rest our brains and bodies to the end that they may respond more readily to the strain put upon them by the efforts involved in following the careers which provide us with the necessities of life. Entertainment is anything which takes us out of our outer world and recreates in us the impulse to meet with greater zest the demands of our daily occupations. It is mental and physical housecleaning to restore the normal efficiency of our minds and bodies to the point of their functioning to their full capacity. Our minds and bodies are co-dependent; they cannot be divorced, each to pursue its independent way. We can think best when our bodies are relaxed; we can relax best when our minds are at rest, when neither disturbs the other by virtue of its greater demand upon our attention.

The arts of the stage and the screen are far apart in all their essentials; the esthetics and demands of one are foreign to the other; but in this discussion stage art serves us as a basis for comparing the two as mediums of entertainment, the purpose being to lay the foundation for later discussions of the screen as a separate, individual art which asks nothing from its nearest of kin. Our discussions are not to deal exclusively with the esthetic demands of the two arts. Both of them have been commercialized to a greater extent than any of the other arts except architecture. A stage or screen artist cannot buy a canvas for a few pennies, take it to a garret and express himself on it with pigments and brushes. His creations demand a broader canvas, the expenditure of money, the help of others who must be paid. A photoplay means nothing when it is just some sheets of paper. It has to be put on film to be sold to the public as entertainment in order that it may bring back the money it cost, to enable another to be presented. While a stage play may be satisfactory reading, it cannot reach its ultimate market until it is produced.

**S**O we must not lose ourselves in a maze of abstract musings on the screen as an art and overlook its financial aspect. In essence the screen is a manufacturing business, governed by the general laws of supply and demand,

whose rules must be observed as all other industries observe them. From such angle is our approach.

The public buys most what it wants most. The market established for screen entertainment is many hundreds of times greater than the peak market established by the stage. The ease of distribution will be advanced by the champion of the art of the stage to explain the screen's greater commercial importance. Here we encounter the first of the basic laws of business which will enter into our arguments. The public will not buy a thing it does not want solely because it can buy it easily. There is no appeal from the law of supply and demand; if the public demanded stage plays, the supply would be forthcoming. Enough money is being spent on screen entertainment in every community in the country today to support a stock company to meet a demand for a living theatre if such demand existed.

Why, then, did the screen, in twenty-five years, assume a hundred times the commercial importance the stage assumed in twenty-five centuries? To find our answer, let us examine both the market and the merchandise the screen and the stage have for sale.

**I**F our purpose in patronizing either be our desire for relaxation, it would follow that we will patronize most the one which permits us to relax most. When we analyze both, we find the stage demands our active, and the screen our passive, intellectual cooperation. The relaxation we can derive from any form of entertainment is lessened by the degree in which our intellects are called upon to participate in it actively. We can be stimulated tremendously by our reaction to purely intellectual appeal; our critical faculties can be exercised to our satisfaction in comparing Leslie Howard's *Hamlet* with that of John Gielgud; but if we are to obtain the greatest pleasure from such mental exercises, our minds must be fresh when we approach them. Stimulating a tired mind does not bring it rest.

When we view a stage play, our minds must be alert; our senses of attention and memory must function actively if we are to get all the play offers. Only by close attention can we fixate the essential point in a given scene in the first act, and only by the functioning of our memories can we be aware of its relation to an incident in the closing act. The complete composition of each act is before us for the full duration of the interval between the rise and fall of the curtain. The stage has devices

for directing our attention to the essential point, but we must be alert in looking for the direction and following it to the desired spot in the composition. A moment of inattention may make us miss the story value of a scene. We cannot be aware the initials on a handkerchief protruding from the pocket of a player is the clue which finally reveals him as an impostor. Our attention must be drawn to it. The rest of the composition cannot be blotted out to leave it as the only object within our range of vision.

**A** stage play can proceed in only one direction—forward. It cannot back-track from the third act to the first to emphasize a point not stressed upon its initial appearance. If the incident of the handkerchief had no significance until the third act was reached, its presence in the first act—too trivial then to have attracted our attention—would have to be recalled by dialogue and action in the later scene. Off-stage action—a disturbance in the street which a player sees by looking out a window in the set—must be described to us in words. The geography of a play is rigid; the audience is stationary. When we view a play, our attention and imagination must function competently if we are to get the full dramatic significance of off-stage incidents related to us, and the functioning of our memory is essential to their proper placing in the drama as it unfolds.

It will be seen, then, that the stage is purely intellectual entertainment with a mixture of real and unreal elements. The players are real people; the forest in the background is a painting. The social demands of the stage are arbitrary. We must be in our seats before the play begins. Owing to the centralization of theatres, almost invariably in business districts, we have to go a considerable distance to reach the one of our choice. The play consumes the entire evening. Attending it is not a mere incident in our social routine; it is an event, perhaps the inspiration for a dinner party or supper afterwards.

**W**HEN we regard the theatre from the standpoint of physiological psychology, and if there be any logic in our reasoning thus far, we cannot escape the conclusion that the reason for the stage drama's failure to establish and maintain an audience as great as that assembled by the screen, is its failure to provide the relaxation of mind we can enjoy only by patronizing a form of entertainment which takes us from the outer world of our daily interest to an inner one of its own. The stage is an aloof art whose footlights and proscenium arch bid us stand back and regard it from a distance. We can enjoy a stage presentation as much as we can a photoplay of equal merit, but owing to the theatre's lack of the desirable restful quality we have no inclination to patronize it as frequently as we do the cinema.

Now let us compare the components of the motion picture with those of the stage play. At the outset we encounter a major difficulty: what is a motion picture? Is it the photograph of a stage play we are getting now in every picture house we attend, a form which tells its story in dialogue; or is it a creation which speaks to us in pic-

torial language, with the smallest possible reliance on audible dialogue as its medium of expression? If we regard it as the former, further discussion would be bootless for the talkie is not art and the laws of no art can be applied to it. It is a mishapen, illegitimate offspring of a misalliance between the stage and the motion picture camera.

**O**UR quest is for a form of screen entertainment which, by meeting most completely the public's demand for mental relaxation, will yield the greatest box-office revenue. As the screen's vast supremacy over the stage as a box-office attraction was established when the mechanical limitations of the former forced it to tell its stories visually and without resort to audible dialogue, it should follow that when sound came to pictures it should have been handled in a manner to cause the least possible disturbance to the elements of established box-office value, that Hollywood should have continued to make motion pictures, with reliance on audible dialogue only sufficiently to expedite the telling of their stories. But the screen went over wholly to talkies. As we proceed with our arguments we will differentiate the two by referring to them as *motion pictures* and *talkies*. The fundamental differences between the two are what we are seeking to discover for the purpose of determining their relative box-office values.

The talkie speaks the language of the stage, the limitations of whose appeal we have established. When we set the screen apart and examine it, we find it has nothing in common with the older art. To argue they are alike because both use actors is as unreasonable as arguing that a building and a pavement are alike because both use concrete, or that money and newspapers are alike because both use paper. We have to look further than the externals of the talkie and the motion picture if we are to discover their differences.

**T**HE appeals of the two arts are as far apart as it is possible for them to be. The stage demands intellectual response, the screen purely emotional response; the former makes its appeal through the aural sense, the latter through the visual sense. What we see is less strain on our faculties than what is conveyed to us in words; listening is more exacting than seeing. The screen's demands on our attention and memory are reduced to a minimum by its mechanics. When the initials on the handkerchief are the clue to the situation, the camera moves forward until all the rest of the composition disappears and we see only the corner of the handkerchief; when our attention should be on one actor in a group, the camera picks him out for us. When it is necessary we should know what the player at the window sees in the street, the camera takes us to the street and we see for ourselves.

The screen annihilates time and space. It can take us from the last reel back to the first to rid memory of the task of recalling an earlier incident, and place emphasis on the incident at the exact moment when the story demands it be most emphatic. It can knit simultaneous action so closely we have the impression of being in several different locations at the same time. By sharp cutting

from a boy caught in a beleaguered Spanish city, to his mother in California and his father in Hong Kong, both anxious for his safety, we feel we are with all three simultaneously by having overcome time, space and causality. This one power alone separates the screen so widely from the stage that the two still would belong to totally different schools of art if in all other respects they were alike.

**F**OR no reason to justify wisdom in deeming the action wise, before the screen abandoned silence it abandoned devices of value to it. The "flash-back," "iris-in" or "iris-out" never is seen now and rarely was seen during the decade preceding the coming of sound, yet all of them were potent instruments for making it easier to follow screen stories. The reason for the abandonment casts an interesting light on picture producer psychology. The flash-back and iris are considered to be old-fashioned. No other reason has been advanced. No intelligent reason can be advanced.

The motion picture makes no social demands. We can enter and leave a picture house when we please, and we do not have to go far in our search of one. In the silent days we developed the attendance habit; it did not matter greatly what our favorite house was showing. Our imagination fashioned our entertainment from the material the screen provided, and the picture had to be a poor one indeed to lack sufficient stimulation to make imaginations function. Since the talkies came, we have learned to shop, our attendance is less regular and box-office receipts show greater fluctuation. Such is the result of our being deprived of the enjoyment of entertaining ourselves. We have to accept a talkie as it is presented to us. It is factual. It offers nothing to the imagination.

**B**UT as yet we have not put our finger on the factor mainly responsible for the screen's supremacy, have not segregated the element more potent than any other in establishing it as the world's leading entertainment medium. This element is *intimacy*.

We are thrilled by a play; we lose ourselves in a book; we stand back and imagine ourselves walking in the cool shades of a sylvan glen an artist has put on canvas; we forget ourselves, and our emotions control us as we listen to the playing of a great symphony—all are arts which parade in front of us to compel our emotional response, which flaunt their attractions with words, paint and sound; they are not intimate arts which completely take us from our outer world to their own inner one, which embrace us, which place chairs for us at the table upon which they spread their feasts.

Screen art makes no pretensions. It does not parade for our inspection, beats no tom-toms to attract our attention. *It creates nothing*. It simply hooks its arm in ours and takes us places with it that we may see what it sees; it leads us into the palace of the king and the hovel of the beggar, it places us beside the bride and groom at the altar; beside the murderer as he climbs the gallows steps and the shipmaster as he guides his vessel through the storm; it takes us to the lowest level of a coal mine, and places us in the first line of attack in a football game.

**P**EOPLE in studios build the palace and the hovel, the gallows and the ship. That is not screen art. The palace is an expression of the art of architecture and is but an element of screen art, as ultra-marine is an element in a painter's color combination. The man on the throne is not a king. He is an actor expressing the art of acting. Thus screen art creates nothing. It absorbs the creations of all other arts, blends them, and makes their unreality seem real. It derives its strength as an entertainment medium from its power to achieve a more nearly perfect illusion of reality than any of the older arts are capable of.

The camera is the instrument which expresses screen art, thus it is the art of photography which gives screen art its visual beauty. Here let me make even more clear what I mean when I say screen art creates nothing.

A painter sets his easel on a hilltop and records on canvas his interpretation of the valley below; a sculptor works in his studio and out of cold marble carves the head of a beautiful child; a weaver expresses his art in a majestic tapestry. A motion picture artist composes an arresting interior in which the painting, the marble and the tapestry play an important part. But even his composition means nothing, is not screen art, until it is expressed by still another art, that of photography.

**T**HE camera is screen art's instrument for leading us into screen scenes, for placing us in immediate contact with a story's characters until we lose all sense of being spectators and become participants in the drama; it enables us to overhear intimate conversations and to look into the eyes of characters to learn thoughts which do not need to be told us in words. It is the camera which makes the screen the least aloof of all the arts, the only art which permits us to have a hand in fashioning its creations, for it is what we put into a true motion picture which makes complete its power to entertain us, not what it itself has to offer. We are participants in motion pictures. We are spectators of talkies.

Everything we see in a motion picture is real to us because there is nothing real to disturb the perfect illusion of reality. On the stage the actors are real, as I already have said, and the scenery is makebelieve. On the screen the actors, the scenery, the land beneath and the sky above are of the same quality, neither tangible nor plastic—merely shadows which float across the screen, and we float along with them on the stream of fancies they create, are enveloped by them, are part of them, so complete is their unity, so perfect the illusion of reality they create and maintain.

*(Our next discussion will deal with the Illusion of Reality, what it means, how the injection of reality destroys it, its importance as an element of screen art.)*

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**O**N the book's jacket you will find, "Art and Prudence; a Study in Practical Philosophy, by Mortimer J. Adler, associate professor of the Philosophy of Law, the University of Chicago; The Moral, the Political and the Esthetic Aspects of the Motion Picture." In the book you will find on 676 closely set, large pages, the most exhaustive analysis of the screen ever undertaken. It is not a book one can race through; Dr. Adler is a scholar, and

must be followed as painstakingly as he sets down his thoughts. This is by way of explaining that I cannot as yet give the volume the careful review its importance as a contribution to screen literature entitles it to, the time I can devote to reading not being sufficient to enable me thus far to more than dip into perhaps a hundred pages here and there and get the general drift of the author's approach to his subject. I have read enough, however, to impress me with the immense value of the work to all those whose interest in the screen is either academic or practical. I do not agree with all the author's conclusions, but at all times he is stimulating, sincere and searching. Everyone engaged in the making of motion picture entertainment should find *Art and Prudence* indispensable to the complete study of screen fundamentals. It is published by Longmans, Green & Company; the price, five dollars.

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**S**INCE producers are always in hysteria for new faces, they could do worse than drop in at the Spotlight Theatre right here in Hollywood. Leonard Lord is presenting a new series of life sketches, of which *Pig Goes Over the Style*, by Ralph Peters, is an excellent sample. He has amassed a genuinely splendid array of talent. In fact, if producers are really serious in their demand for new blood—their troubles are easily solved. All they have to do is to drop in any night for the next two weeks, at 1011 North Cole Avenue, and take their pick. There are plenty of good bets to choose from.

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**B**EAMS ENDS (Longmans, Green & Company, \$2.00) is Errol Flynn on paper. On the screen he plays other people, but in the pages of this delightfully devil-may-careish little book he plays himself, with considerable literary charm takes us with him on a happy-go-lucky cruise to islands in the South Seas, and relates the things which happen to him and his equally irresponsible shipmates, trivial things, most of them, but important in their literary setting by virtue of the author's skill at making them entertaining. It is a book to make complete an evening at home.

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**Q**UITE the neatest compliment to come our way in a long time is this from a New York woman who reads the SPECTATOR regularly: "Thank you for letting the SPECTATOR readers share the trials and tribulations you and Mrs. Spectator encountered in moving. Sandwiched in with the reviews, in your own inimitable manner, I found the reading to be very good exercise for the corners of my mouth, and I feel that I am indebted to you for a beauty treatment."

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**A**CCORDING to *Variety*, motion picture producers are considering the advisability of bringing grand operas to the screen—a case of the liveliest medium thinking of photographing the deadest and offering it as entertainment. No doubt the argument is that the public has been denied the classic operas and would welcome their being brought to it on film. In New York, with all its millions of people, grand opera finds it tough going for a few weeks each year. If the general public wanted such entertain-

ment, New York would have several opera houses open the year around—that is, if the desire were great enough to justify the film industry in going into the grand opera business. Operas are as far removed from legitimate motion picture material as anything could be. The film industry should be content with the number of flops it is making now, although, if it wants more, the surest way to get them is to photograph grand operas. However, I take *Variety's* story with a pinch of salt. There must be some limit to Hollywood's lunacy.

## Some Late Previews

### A Little Long But Lovely

MAYTIME, MGM. Producer, Hunt Stromberg; director, Robert Z. Leonard; original, Rida Johnson Young; screen play, Noel Langley; music, Sigmund Romberg; musical adaptation and direction, Herbert Stothart; special lyrics, Bob Wright and Chet Forrest; French adaptation, Gilles Guilbert; opera sequences, William von Wymetal; dances, Val Raset; photographer, Oliver T. Marsh; montage effects, Elavko Vorkapich; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Fredric Hope and Edwin B. Willis; film editor, Conrad A. Nervig. Cast: Jeanette MacDonald, Nelson Eddy, John Barrymore, Herman Bing, Tom Brown, Lynne Carver, Rafaela Ottiano, Charles Judels, Paul Porcasi, Sig Rumann, Walter Kingsford, Guy Bates Post, Anna Demetrio, Frank Puglia, Don Cossacks Chorus.

**U**P to my point of saturation I reveled in the pleasures *Maytime* provided, and marveled again at the amazing power of a properly used screen to bring us such extraordinarily delightful entertainment. Musically, it is the finest thing the screen has done, for it presents good music which comes just a little this side of being too good for popular consumption. In Jeanette MacDonald it has a beautiful young woman who can play a role with charm and understanding, and who possesses a rich true, clear singing voice and knowledge of how to use it; in Nelson Eddy, a personable young man with a magnetic personality, good looks and a superb voice; in John Barrymore, a great artist, who makes his characterization powerful by its very simplicity, quietness and lack of obvious effort. It has, too, some skilled supporting players, Rafaela Ottiano, and Herman Bing being among those contributing impressive performances.

Noel Langley wrote an original screen play slightly reminiscent of the original whose name it uses, and gives us a warmly human romance which Metro has made visual with its accustomed thoroughness and regard for scenic effect, the beauty of the production making us wonder again at Cedric Gibbon's apparently exhaustless artistic resources. To him and his associates, Fredric Hope and Edwin Willis, goes much of the credit for the pleasure the picture will give. All the material assembled by artists in so many lines has been molded by Hunt Stromberg, producer, and Robert Leonard, director, into one of the finest creations the screen has given us. Leonard's direction is particularly creditable. He makes the romance tender, the comedy rich, the drama consistent.

**T**HE esthetic appeal of *Maytime* is tremendous, its visual beauty being matched by the rich quality of the

music so powerfully at times the point of poignancy is reached. By the time the offering has run two-thirds of its long course the audience is satiated with its charms, has had as much esthetic pleasure as it can absorb, its eyes and its ears being satisfied fully. At this point the picture presents a sequence which is the peak of its artistic attainment. It is an operatic interlude based on Tschai-kowsky's *Fifth Symphony*, noble music nobly presented, magnificently played and sung, and emphasizing the screen's superiority over the stage in the presentation of grand opera. It is sung in French. Only those familiar with that language can follow its story. Coming after the audience has had about all the music it can stand, the interlude would have to possess strong story value to hold the attention of the audience. Lacking such value, however, it comes as an extra dish served after the guests already had gorged themselves into a state of stuffed ecstasy.

One can see the working of Hunt Stromberg's mind. He made the long *Great Ziegfeld*. It was an outstanding box-office success. Why not another just as long? But to sustain its length *Ziegfeld* had a wide variety of esthetic appeal. It had Luise Rainer's dramatic pathos, Fannie Brice's robust comedy, Nat Pendleton's strong man act, William Powell's characterization of a man still fresh in memory, Virginia Bruce's performance unlike any in *Maytime*, gorgeous spectacle and popular music, all combining to form a varied diet, easy of assimilation and served so expertly the audience did not have too much of one dish before it disappeared and another took its place.

But *Maytime* is a screen triumph, and when it is shortened by the elimination of most of the Tschai-kowsky number—all that portion which precedes the love scene—it will rank among the greatest film accomplishments.

## Another Success for Walter

**HISTORY IS MADE AT NIGHT**, United Artists release of Walter Wanger production. Stars Charles Boyer, Jean Arthur and Leo Carrillo. Directed by Frank Borzage; original story and screen play by Gene Towne and Graham Baker; additional dialogue, Vincent Lawrence and David Hertz; art direction, Alexander Toluboff; director of photograph, David Abel; special technical effects, James Basevi; musical direction, Alfred Newman; film editor, Margaret Clancey; costumes, Bernard Newman; sound, Paul Neal; assistant director, Lew Borzage. Supporting cast: Colin Clive, Ivan Lebedeff, George Meeker, Lucien Prival, George Davis, Georges Renavent, Barry Norton, Harvey Clarke, Phyllis Barry, Helen Millard, Oscar Apfel, Jack Mulhall, Edward Earle, George Humbert. Running time, 95 minutes.

**WHEN** Walter Wanger makes one we can expect something outstanding in the way of a visual treat. He is aware of the box-office value of a pictorially attractive screen, of meticulous attention to detail in the construction and dressing of sets, of the satisfaction an audience derives from artistically composed and expertly photographed wide camera sweeps when his stories go out of doors. *History Is Made at Night* is richly cinematic in all its externals, thanks to the creations of Alexander Toluboff, art director, and the superb camera work of David Abel. The technical effects of James Basevi, which, I presume, include the awe-inspiring spectacle of a great

ship wrecked by collision with an iceberg, play a large part in making the production well worth seeing. Obviously money was spent unsparingly in an effort to please the public, and the public no doubt will respond in a manner to make the investment a profitable one.

Gene Towne and Graham Baker contrived, on the whole, to fabricate a story which will hold your attention, even though there are elements in it you may find hard to believe. The characterization given Colin Clive is overdrawn to an extent to make Jean Arthur's marriage to him seem outside the range of probabilities, and no one will believe a commodore in charge of a ship carrying a personnel of three thousand passengers and crew, would obey telephonic orders from its owner on land to drive his ship at full speed through waters where icebergs were known to be floating. The commander of a vessel has supreme authority when at sea, but here we have one who takes orders from a man ashore when his lowliest deckhand could have told him the risk was suicidal.

**BUT** Towne and Baker have filled the story so full of believable situations and opportunities for rich characterizations, and Wanger has cast it so ably that under the skilled direction of Old Master Borzage it comes to the screen as first-class entertainment. The material he has to work with seemingly is a matter of indifference to Frank, everything being grist that comes to his mill. There is some of everything in this picture and all of it is woven into a consistent pattern which gives us Borzage at his best. Particularly adept is he at bringing out the human qualities of the performances, at making his people the persons they are playing. Three such performances as those given by Jean Arthur, Charles Boyer and Leo Carrillo would make any production outstanding even if it had little else to recommend it. It is screen acting at the peak of its possibilities.

Each time I see Jean Arthur on the screen of late I recall the time I last saw her in person. It was six or seven years ago on the Paramount lot. We walked back and forth in one of its streets as she told me how troubled she was about her screen career, how producers considered her voice unsuited to the microphone. She asked me what I thought of the wisdom of her going to New York and having a fling at the stage, as apparently the screen was through with her. I advised her to go, and in various SPECTATORS I berated producers for letting her go, pointing out each time that she had great screen possibilities. Jean now is demonstrating with each appearance that she is a really great actress, but her stage experience added nothing to what she took to it when pictures told her she was through. It is nearly seven years since I wrote, "In spite of its present neglect of her, Jean Arthur some day will be one of the outstanding stars of the screen."

See the Wanger picture even if only to see Jean. But she is but one of its manifold virtues which heavily outweigh its few faults.

## Another Warner Winner

**CALL IT A DAY**, a Warner Bros. picture. Executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Henry Blanke; directed by Archie L. Mayo; assistant director, Jack Sullivan; screen play by

Casey Robinson; from the play by Dodie Smith; photography by Ernest Haller, A.S.C.; film editor, James Gibbons; art director, John Hughes; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; gowns by Orry-Kelly. Cast: Olivia de Havilland, Ian Hunter, Anita Louise, Alice Brady, Roland Young, Freida Inescort, Bonita Granville, Peggy Wood, Marcia Ralston, Walter Woolf King, Peter Willes, Una O'Connor, Beryl Mercer, Elsa Buchanan, Mary Field.

**E**XCELLENT entertainment and an emphatic demonstration of the screen's vast superiority over the stage as a medium for presenting a stage play. *Call It a Day* is frankly a photographed play, borrowing the mechanics of the screen but leaving the art of the screen untouched. I saw the Duffy presentation of the Dodie Smith play at El Capitan, and praised it highly in my review of it, but in retrospect the stage presentation seems but a pale imitation of what the screen presents. The camera follows the story, not only into each setting, but into the particular spot in the setting where the story interest lies, eliminating that part of the whole composition which for the moment does not demand our attention. Thus we have the essential point of each scene located for us which enables us to follow the story with the least possible mental effort on our part.

However, in this instance, what I call the story is not a story. Nothing happens. We see a family of five arise in the morning, live its day, go to bed again at night. That is all there is to *Call It a Day*. What makes it delightful is its presentation in a manner which makes it easy for us to project ourselves into it. Variations of each of the trivial happenings in it have happened to you and me, things we deemed serious and important at the time of their happening, but which an onlooker would have found as amusing as we find everything the screen presents. For all of Olivia de Havilland's tragic weeping over her unrequited love, her mother's embarrassment when Roland Young makes fervent love to her, her father's squirming when an alluring siren endeavors to make him a victim of her charms, there is not a serious moment in the play. It fairly bubbles with humor.

**A**RCHIE Mayo is skilled to a superlative degree in making his characters human. They do not act. They live. He uses his camera merely to record their actions, not to distract our attention from what is photographed to the manner in which it is photographed. In a Mayo picture there is no striving for camera effects, no attempt to achieve photographic art by striking lighting or odd camera angles. He leads us straight through his stories without asking us to pause and contemplate his cleverness, creating the impression that his characters are living the stories and are not following a director through them. It is the only kind of direction which could have confined practically all the action in his *Petrified Forest* to one room and make it both interesting and believable. His direction of *Call It a Day* reaches the peak of perfection.

Warner Brothers have mounted the picture handsomely, and against the artistic backgrounds they provide, the players move in a collection of the most evenly balanced performances it has been our good fortune to have been presented with in a long, long time. Glance at the cast

presented above and circle each name with a wreath of praise. To Casey Robinson goes recognition for a screen play of outstanding merit. It is not just a screen version of a stage play. He takes full advantage of his more elastic medium, remolds the play for camera presentation, adds luster to it and displays a rare grasp of screen requirements. Henry Blanke, associate producer, adds *Call It a Day* to his long list of outstanding productions. In the past two years no other producer in the world has given the public a series of superlative screen creations such as Blanke has to his credit. And back of all of them, of course, has been that wise old owl, Hal Wallis, who, in his quiet way, has an extraordinary knack for getting things done.

## Keeping Lowe in Low

**ESPIONAGE**, Metro picture and release. Produced by Harry Rapf; directed by Kurt Neumann; screen play by Manuel Seff, Leonard Lee and Ainsworth Morgan; from the play by Walter Hackett; musical score by Dr. William Axt; recording directed by Douglas Shearer; art direction by Cedric Gibbons; Eddie Imazu and Edwin B. Willis, associates; photographed by Ray June; film editor, W. Donn Hayes; assistant director, Jimmy Dugan. Cast: Edmund Lowe, Madge Evans, Paul Lukas, Ketti Gallian, Skeets Gallagher, Frank Reicher, William Gilbert, Robert Graves, Leonid Kinskey, Mitchell Lewis, Charles Trowbridge, Barnett Parker, Nita Pike, Juan Torena, George Sorel, Gaston Glass and Egon Breecher. Running time, 62 minutes.

**O**F course, if you are caught in the sidewalk congestion on the Boulevard on Dollar Day and find yourself pushed into a picture house showing *Espionage*, there is no reason why you should get rough and fight your way back to the street. Remain at least until you cease panting, by which time the amusing elements of this Metro production may impress you sufficiently to lure you into sitting it through. But do not expect anything high, wide, and handsome in the way of a story. The opening shots give promise of an international spy drama, the middle section is comedy and the hind end farce, the thematic cocktail being entertaining in a mild sort of way. No picture with Edmund Lowe and Madge Evans in it can be a total loss, but why Metro wastes them on such trivial story material is a puzzle.

Lowe has another of those smart-aleck roles it has been his misfortune to get lately, each offering him only an opportunity to repeat the performances he had given previously. Coming in a series of dramatic parts it would be a refreshing change, but a succession of them does not appear to me as good box-office. Madge Evans for years has been one of my staunch favorites who in her more mature years has retained all the charm which made her appealing as a child. She combines a lovable personality with acting ability, a combination which spells box-office success. Her role in *Espionage* is not quite as goofy as Lowe's, her performance being the most ingratiating feature of the production.

**A**GAIN in this picture we have a demonstration of the value of a supporting cast of capable players. The story's weakness has compensation in a series of excellent characterizations. Paul Lukas, whose many brilliant performances entitle him to more important roles than he has

been getting of late; Billy Gilbert, a really excellent comedian; Skeets Gallagher, one of the cleverest young men on the screen; Frank Reicher, always the skilled actor; Mitchell Lewis and Gaston Glass, bringing back memories of impressive past performances; several others who make little bits stand out, form a collection of players whose support of the feature names develops whatever merit the offering possesses. I have left for special mention a character actor whose work in previous pictures has impressed me—Leonid Kinsky, one of the unsung horde whose skill makes stars, but who never gain even feature billing for themselves. Kinsky plays an anarchist bent on the blowing-up of Lukas, an armament mogul. He is lanky, wild looking individual with a keen comedy sense and ability to project it. His contribution to *Espionage* is a big one.

Kurt Neumann's direction reveals no weak spot, but it was beyond his powers to make the story convincing. For instance, much footage is consumed in showing us action on a train; no sound of the train is heard and no passengers sway to show us it is rounding a curve. I know of no route from Paris to Switzerland which is perfectly straight and has rubber rails. However, it is a nice train inside, the private car on the end of it being particularly attractive. The whole production in fact, is fully up to Metro's high standard, and Ray June's photography does it justice.

## Drama Well Sustained

**WHITE BONDAGE**, a Warner Bros. picture. Associate producer, Bryan Foy; director, Nick Grinde; assistant director, Marshall Hageman; original story and screen play by Anthony Coldeway; photography by Lu O'Connell, A.S.C.; film editor, Frank Dewar; art director, Esdras Hartley; dialogue director, Reginald R. Hammerstein; technical adviser, Mrs. Elizabeth Hearst. Cast: Jeon Muir, Gordon Oliver, Howard Phillips, Joseph King, Harry Davenport, Virginia Brissac, Addison Richards, Cy Kendall, Milt Kibbee, Gordon Hart, Eddie Anderson, Bernice Pilot, Trevor Bardette, Vic Potel, Herbert Heywood, Tom Wilson, Guy Usher, Jack Mower, Georgia Simmons.

**H**ERE is one with an interesting weakness. It sticks so closely to its theme, pursues so ruthlessly the path its mounting drama takes, puts such a strain on our feeling of expectancy, that audience reaction is one of nervous tension. At previews of *White Bondage* some laughter greeted a few of the serious scenes. The studio regarded it as registering a weakness in the picture. In reality it was a tribute to the singleness-of-purpose of the production, to the faithfulness with which Anthony Coldeway adhered to the straight line of his story and refrained from committing the sin of including comedy interpolations to make it easier to take. It is one of the class B productions which Bryan Foy turns out with such bewildering rapidity. I do not know if it is because I am getting used to them, but they do seem to be getting better all the time.

This one, for instance, is quite good enough to grip any audience. And it means something. Yesterday I had only a hazy idea of the lives lived by share-croppers in the cotton states, of the treatment they received from those for whom they raise cotton. This morning I know a great deal about it. I feel I have been in the cotton

fields and have seen things for myself. Of course, I must presume the picture accurately records conditions; but, even so, an awful howl will go up from the cotton bigwigs when it is shown Down South. It certainly shows the poor farmers getting a rotten deal from the higher-ups.

**T**HE educational or propaganda aspect of *White Bondage* makes it a picture well worth seeing. Reviews of it you will read will dismiss it as an unimportant dual-bill feature, but you should not let that keep you away. You have seen, as I have, many references in the papers to the conditions under which share-croppers exist, and if you are interested enough to get a close-up of them, to get a real grasp of the situation, the picture gives you the opportunity.

And Jean Muir is in it, having the kind of homespun role I have been anxious to see her play again ever since I was impressed by her performance in *As the Earth Turns*, a powerful rural drama directed a few years ago by Al Green. Jean seems to be endowed naturally for the farm-girl type; she is a gifted actress, there being few of her age in Hollywood who can come any way near her, and a series of characterizations such as she gives in *White Bondage*, would give the box-office what it needs—refreshing variety in the procession of the sweet young things. Gordon Oliver and Howard Phillips are two young men who will be heard from. Virginia Brissac, Harry Davenport, Joseph King, Addison Richards are others whose performances are excellent. The picture is the best directorial job Nick Grinde has done, his success in sustaining the mood of the story being its outstanding feature.

## Rather An Unsavory Mess

**MARKED WOMAN**, a First National picture. Executive producer, Hal B. Willis; associate producer, Lou Edelman; directed by Lloyd Bacon; assistant director, Dick Mayberry; original screen play by Robert Rossen and Abem Kinkel; photography by George Barnes, A.S.C.; film editor, Jack Killifer; art director, Max Parker; gowns by Orry-Kelly; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; music and lyrics by Harry Warren and Al Dubin. Cast: Bette Davis, Humphrey Bogart, Lola Lane, Isabel Jewell, Eduardo Ciannelli, Jane Bryan, Rosalind Marquis, Mayo Methot, Allen Jenkins, John Litel, Ben Welden, Damian O'Flynn, Henry O'Neill, Raymond Hatton, Carlos San Martin, William B. Davidson, Kenneth Harlan, Robert Strange, James Robbins, Arthur Aylesworth, John Sheehan, Sam Wren, Edwin Stanley, Alan Davis, Allen Matthews, Guy Usher.

**U**NLESS we can develop sympathy for the hero and heroine of a screen story, we cannot derive much satisfaction from viewing a picture in which they are presented. When a producer starts to make a motion picture there is one major objective of which he must not lose sight—he so must blend all the elements of his screen creation that in the mind of the audience a wish will be created, and before the picture ends the wish must be granted. No romance can be good film box-office if the story is told—as practically all of them are—in a manner to create in the mind of the audience a desire to see *Boy marry Girl* only to disappoint it in the end by concluding the romance with a quarrel and their separation. The wish-fulfillment treatment is essential to the complete satisfaction of the audience with anything offered it on the



screen. The easiest way to accomplish it is to direct sympathy to the character or characters most worthy of it.

The wish need not concern romances only, but in a medium of such wide appeal as the screen, the story should end at least with virtue triumphant. In *Marked Woman*, for instance, there is no romance, which does not harm it; but neither is there any virtue in the character of the central figure for whom our sympathy is enlisted. Bette Davis plays a girl several degrees more debased than a harlot whose only infraction of the social code is the practice of her profession. Bette's profession in the picture is that of "hostess" in a night club, her duties being to get patrons drunk, and then to lure them into a gambling room where crooked gamblers rob them of their money.

**O**NE of Bette's victims is a nice young fellow who covers his losses with a check on a non-existent bank account. When her employer learns the check is worthless, the nice young fellow is "taken for a ride," and next morning his body is found in the river. Then all of Bette's loyalty comes out; at the resultant trial she perjures herself, gives testimony which clears the murderers. Her sister, a sweet young college girl, comes to the city, is lured to the night club, a man old enough to be her father forces his attentions on her, presses his drunken lips on hers in one of the most revolting scenes the screen has given us, and because she resents the action, the night club proprietor hits her a vicious blow on the face, knocks her downstairs, the blow and fall killing her. And next morning her body is found in the river.

And then our noble young heroine is actuated by a motive basically as unworthy as her degraded sense of loyalty. Revenge becomes her impelling urge. She crosses over to the side of the law, not because she has respect for it, but because it can become the instrument of her revenge. She had kept in step with her employer as long as he confined his murdering to the victims she led to slaughter, but when he murdered her sister—well, that was carrying the thing past the point of tolerance of any young lady with strict regard for the ethics of her profession.

**A**ND Warner Brothers, who gave us the ennobling *White Angel*, the thoughtful *Pasteur*, the dignified *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the imaginative *Green Pastures*, presents this stinking mess to the world as screen entertainment. There might be some excuse for it if it had application to any one considerable division of our social structure, to some cancer infesting a large class of our population; but it applies only to a few degenerates, of whose existence we would be better off if we were ignorant. Maudlin attempts to justify it are made in dialogue whose philosophy is as warped as are the moral compunctions of the leading characters in the story. The majesty of the law is invoked, of course, but if that is the theme of the story it could have been developed with wider application and less odor.

The pity of it is that in all departments the picture reveals expert craftsmanship wasted on unworthy story material. Warners have given it a handsome presenta-

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tion, Lloyd Bacon's direction is excellent throughout, every one of the many performances is convincing, and there are none of the annoying comedy interpolations to take the story out of character. If your tastes run to the kind of story I have outlined, you will enjoy the picture. It is an uncompromising document, honest in its lack of pretense at being anything except what it is, an unsavory whiff of a social pinpoint. As a reward for sitting through it you will see what is perhaps the greatest finish ever given a motion picture.

Bette and her four companions, all in the same business, have given their testimony, verdicts of guilty have been returned, sentences pronounced, and the five girls leave the court house. It is a foggy night. As newspaper reporters loudly hail the district attorney (Humphrey Bogart, whose performance is outstanding) as the next governor because of his masterly handling of the case, the girls, whose evidence made conviction possible, who now have no jobs, who virtually are social outcasts, walk quietly into the fog which closes around them. It is an inspired example of symbolism possible only to the motion picture camera.

### It's Tops

TWENTY-THREE-AND-A-HALF HOURS' LEAVE, Douglas MacLean production. Adapted from the Saturday Evening Post story by Mary Roberts Rinehart. Directed by John G. Blystone; screen play by Henry McCarty and Harry Ruskin; additional dialogue by Samuel J. Warshawsky; executive aide, Jules Schermer; production manager, Emile deRuelle; photographed by Jack Mackenzie; art director, Ben Carre; film editor, Russell Schoengarth; sound by Glen Rominger; sets by Victor Ganglelin; musical director, Marlin Skiles; songs by Sammy Stept and Ted Koehler. Cast: James Ellison,

Terry Walker, Morgan Hill, Arthur Lake, Paul Harvey, Wally Maher, Andy Andrews, Murray Alper, Pat Gleason, John Kelly, Russell Hicks, Ward Bond. Running time, 72 minutes.

*Reviewed By Paul Jacobs*

**A** RICH and penetratingly splendid singing voice, a vivid and genuine bit of war training—camp memories and the honest and homely humor of a typical bunch of clean-cut young American soldiers. Throw in a sweet touch of youthful love—and you have *Twenty-Three-And-A-Half-Hours' Leave*. Producer Douglas MacLean has my complete respect. He is one of the few who consistently give us straight, undiluted entertainment.

Director John G. Blystone has what it takes. When one realizes that the slightest error of judgement, the littlest bit of wrong mood introduced would have turned this corking comedy into Hollywood hooey, one must bow to the deep understanding responsible. Mr. Blystone and Mr. MacLean, my salutations.

And by the way, *Twenty-Three-And-A-Half-Hours' Leave* demonstrates the SPECTATOR'S contention that the B release can and should be entirely as good as any class A picture. This one is much more fun than most of the "supers." Naturally, Mary Roberts Rinehart knows her audience values. But that scripters Henry McCarty and Harry Ruskin would recapture them so perfectly is unusual and a tribute to them and to dialoguer Samuel Warshawsky.

**J**IMMY Ellison is perfectly cast, his magnificent voice and his thoroughly pleasing personality carry the movement strongly. Terry Walker is appealing as the human daughter of the General. And this brings us to the boys. I spent considerable time in the training camps, and the chap who saw this film with me is also a reservist in the army. We both were struck with the absolute authenticity of the atmosphere and humor. Thus, Arthur Lake, Wally Maher, Andy Andrews, Murry Alper and the other cadets are responsible to a large extent for the general excellence of the picture.

I missed only one thing—the old-time war refrains, which might even more completely captured the mood. But I am not complaining. It is too seldom that I get a chance so completely to enjoy a picture. You will say the same thing when you see it, because it is one of these "must" pictures.

## Van Riper Is Ripping

A FAMILY AFFAIR, Metro production and release. Produced by Lucien Hubbard and Samuel Marx; directed by George B. Seitz; screen play by Kay Van Riper; from a play by Aurania Rouverol; photographed by Lester White; assistant director, James Dugan; film editor, George Boemler; musical score, David Snell; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art directors, Cedric Gibbons, associates, John Detlie and Edwin G. Willis. Cast: Lionel Barrymore, Cecilia Parker, Eric Linden, Mickey Rooney, Charley Grapewin, Spring Byington, Julie Hayden, Sara Haden, Allen Vincent, Margaret Marquis, Selmer Jackson, Harlan Briggs. Running time, 67 minutes.

*Reviewed by Paul Jacobs*

**B**Y the law of averages every once in a while we get a home-life picture which compensates for all the other home-life pictures. *A Family Affair* is one of these rare

filmic curiosities. In a large measure the splendid screen play by Kay Van Riper is responsible, but of equal importance is the touchingly understanding direction of George B. Seitz. They make an imposing team. Add to this smooth mixture the histrionic genius of Lionel Barrymore, the unquenchable spontaneity of Mickey Rooney, the always excellent work of Eric Linden, and the technical excellence of M.G.M., and you have the flawless human-interest story.

It seems needless to add that Spring Byington gives us her usual exquisite characterization of an adorable mother. The support too, is gracefully accomplished by Cecilia Parker, Charley Grapewin, Julie Hayden, Sara Haden and Margaret Marquis. I might add that Aurania Rouverol's original play must have been a corker to inspire the film script.

It is interesting to note the particular ingredients that make *A Family Affair* so entirely entertaining. The plot itself, the struggle of an honest judge to fulfill his oath of office in the face of damning opposition, is entirely in accord with the principles I have laid down in several SPECTATOR articles. The trick of giving the main character maximum opposition, to be combated by his dominant trait, is the structural essence of *A Family Affair*. The reality illusion is rhythmically induced through the constantly reiterated theme and the heavy insistence of sub-thematic treatment, the hundred-and-one little touches we all recognize as true to life.

Put *A Family Affair* on your must list, and notice the fun you get from the true family flavor.

## Pleasant Little Murder

DEAD YESTERDAY, Twentieth Century-Fox. Directed by James Tinling; associate producer, John Stone; screen play by Bess Meredyth, William Conselman and Jerry Cady; based on a story by Mignon Eberhart; photography, Harry Jackson, A.S.C.; art direction, Albert Hogsett; assistant director, Samuel Schneider; film editor, Nick De Maggio; costumes, Herschel; sound, G. P. Costello and Harry M. Leonard; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Jane Darwell, Sig Rumann, Sally Blane, Thomas Beck, Joan Davis, William Demarest, George Walcott, Wade Boteler, Howard Phillips.

*Reviewed by Paul Jacobs*

**T**HE vicious bark of gangster guns and the chilling wail of police sirens usher in the gripping mood of *Dead Yesterday's* beginning. It is a vast pity that a beginning as promising as this one, is usually wasted as it is in this case. A magnificent start dwindles away to a long series of verbal battles. If sound had never come to Hollywood *Dead Yesterday* would have been a top point of entertainment.

It is because the novel complexities of Mignon Eberhart's original must be seen by the audience to be understood, that the script by Bess Meredyth, William Conselman and Jerry Cady is poor. There is nothing wrong with James Tinling's direction however, and the mounting is excellent, aiding materially in developing the mood.

Jane Darwell carries off first honors for her authentic interpretation of a fast-thinking, sound-charactered old head nurse. Sig Rumann, a newcomer, gives Miss Darwell a tough battle for first place. His pompous, hard-headed Dr. Triggert is a little masterpiece. Also deeply effective is Thomas Beck who seems destined for bigger

things. Sally Blane is sweet enough and Joan Davis is her inimitably goofy self. The support of Wm. Demarest, George Walcott, Wade Boteler and Howard Phillips is smooth, well-timed and skilfully drawn. *Dead Yesterday* is another of the many might-have-beens. Still, it will not bore you. Just don't go out of your way to see it.

## Innocuous But Nice

THAT I MAY LIVE, 20th-Fox production and release. Executive producer, Sol M. Wurtzel; directed by Allan Dwan; screen play by Ben Markson and William Conselman; photography by Robert Planck; art direction by Lewis Creber; assistant director, Aaron Rosenberg; film editor, Louis Loeffler; costumes by Herschel; sound by George Leverett and Harry M. Leonard; musical direction by Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Rochelle Hudson, Robert Kent, J. Edward Bromberg, Jack La Rue, Frank Conroy, Fred Kelsey, George Cooper, De Witt Jennings, Russell Simpson, William Benedict. Running time, 70 minutes.

Reviewed By Paul Jacobs

**A**LTHOUGH *That I May Live* will never be remembered twenty-four hours after you see it, this newest Sol M. Wurtzel production neatly fulfills its mission. It is an hour of solid entertainment. Robert Kent gives his most convincing portrayal to date as the boy who has been framed by crooks. Many many SPECTATORS ago, Mr. Beaton called attention to the possibilities the, then, unknown Mr. Kent possessed. Still later, I saw Robert Kent for the first time in his Mountie role and I too recognized box-office in his personality. In *That I May Live* Kent gives us the work of the finished craftsman.

Teamed with him for the second time, Rochelle Hudson displays a grasp of dramatic essentials, a sensitivity to her role which puts her into the upper register of fine actresses. But regardless of the excellent work of these two, the vote for perfect performance must go to J. Edward Bromberg for one of the best characterizations of the year. His Tex Shapiro is a masterpiece. Mr. Bromberg is justified in having his eye on the Academy Award.

With careful attention to dramatic details, and a fine understanding of the filmic flow, director Allan Dwan has injected the last possible bit of realism into his picture. He should be given the bigger pictures he used to do. Practical mounting and an efficient technical staff, combined with a pleasing supporting cast, make *That I May Live* a genuine bid for family tickets.

## Engaging Entertainment

THE MAN WHO FOUND HIMSELF, RKO. Directed by Lew Landers; associate producer, Cliff Reid; screen play by J. Robert Bren, Edmund L. Hartmann, G. V. Atwater and Thomas Lennon; from the story, WINGS OF MERCY, by Alice F. Curtis; photographed by J. Roy Hunt, A.S.C.; special effects by Vernon L. Walker, A.S.C.; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate, Howard Campbell; recorded by Denzil A. Cutler; edited by Jack Hively; assistant director, Charles Kerr. Cast: John Beal, Joan Fontaine, Philip Huston, Jane Walsh, George Irving, James Conlin, Frank M. Thomas, Diana Gibson, Dwight Frye, Billy Gilbert.

Reviewed by Allan Hersholt

**M**ANUFACTURED, at a cost far from great, for the lower-bracket position of a double-feature program, this Radio enterprise emerges as an offering sufficiently

meritorious quite adequately to fill the superior place of such a program in a first-rate theatre. Mounted in handsome fashion, directed splendidly and acted capably, it owns not an unconvincing moment and earns for itself acclaim as an engaging example of expert story-telling. All involved in its creation have done well, the director's work being particularly successful.

About twenty-four months ago Carl Laemmle, Sr., revealed his confidence in a Universal employe, one who had occupied an unimportant place there for years, by providing him with a directorial opportunity. The employe, then Louis Friedlander, now Lew Landers, began by shooting serials. During the entire production of the second such offering which he made, I was associated with him, and one day I told him he would experience notable success in his career.

Since then he has given us half a dozen excellently-directed feature pictures and has been rewarded with a long-term Radio contract. A genuine asset to the industry, he will continue his rapid rise and before long find himself a widely-acclaimed director. *Man Who Found Himself*, his newest effort, takes him a few steps nearer to Hollywood's directorial peak.

**W**HILE the beholder knows what eventually will happen in the story, the picture sustains interest consistently. As a matter of fact, no screen presentation I have seen in a long while has held my attention more closely than *Man Who Found Himself*, which completely achieves its goal—the illusion of reality. Possessing an intelligent grasp of all phases of screen expression, the ability to handle, with equal authority, drama, comedy and romance, the director has handled it with admirable smoothness and understanding. His is an outstanding job, one of the best pieces of direction ever given a B production.

In the title role John Beal gives a distinguished, beautifully shaded portrayal, and opposite him is a newcomer, Joan Fontaine, whose charm and thoroughly convincing work is expected to gain for her many admirers. Work of Philip Huston, a most agreeable young actor, lends strength to my belief that he is headed for stardom. The five writers credited at the head of this review have done their work in a decidedly praiseworthy manner, and the photographic department attains fine results.

Cliff Reid, production associate, adds another fine picture to his long and rapidly-growing list.

\* \* \*

**S**EVEN years ago the Radio Corporation of America announced a plan for weekly programs of televised films. It made Hollywood shiver and exhibitors gasp. In its weak way, the SPECTATOR at the time urged the film industry not to get scared, arguing that television never could become a competitor of motion pictures; but each time there is news of a further development in it there is further discussion of its effect on pictures. The discussion should be postponed until television becomes a fact, at which time the SPECTATOR will reassert its conviction that it will not compete with pictures.

\* \* \*

In Sydney, Australia, Universal's *Show Boat* has broken all records for that city in starting on its twenty-ninth week of profitable business.

# New York Spectacle

By Frederick Stone

**N**OW coming to the close of its long run at the Film-arte theatre here, where it has been even more of a success than *Carnival in Flanders*, which preceded it, is the Swiss film, *The Eternal Mask*. This picture is one which Welford Beaton would see with tears of joy, and perhaps, who knows, of gratitude, for it follows his precepts in every respect, and as a result is a most powerful demonstration of their fundamental rightness. The fact that it was made by a company organized by the author when he could find no established producer to take it up, probably has a great deal to do with the excellent treatment it received.

Briefly, the story tells of a young doctor in a Basle hospital who disobeys the orders of his superior and tries his new serum on one of the victims of a meningitis epidemic. The patient dies, and the doctor, accused of murder by the patient's wife and assailed with his own doubts, loses his sanity. Now through the subjective uses of camera technique each member of the audience is transported into the crazed mind of the doctor, and goes with him through his mental agonies and aberrations.

**N**O other art could as acutely have made us perceive this whirling insanity, and the music and bits of dialogue which accompany the action exactly fill out the impression. Excellent use is made of the bizarre atonalities of modern music. Presently we are concerned also with the efforts of the hospital staff to cure the doctor of his hallucinations, for it has been discovered that the patient died of embolism and not from the effects of the serum—and it now becomes necessary to cure the doctor so that he can retrieve his lost formula and recreate the successful serum.

Now we are able, through the brilliant technique of the director and through the resourcefulness of the camera, to be at one moment in the mind of the insane doctor, and at the next moment to be with the physicians who work frantically to save him. In this titanic psycho-analytic struggle we are at once on both sides, a fact which heightens immeasurably the drama and the suspense. At last a younger doctor, using a more modern theory of the cure than does the head of the hospital, succeeds in restoring his colleague's identity to him, and the day is saved.

**T**HE originality of the story and of its handling is great, and caused me to wonder why such freshness of subject and of treatment are so rare, if not altogether non-existent, in our American films. There is no suggestion of romance in its hackneyed boy-meets-girl form—but it does propose the truth, so obvious yet so rarely heeded by film makers, that there is an immensely arresting quality of romance and adventure in the world of scientific research. Reduced likewise to its simplest terms, man discovers serum, man loses serum, man finds serum again.

When at least half of our adult audiences are engaged in the romance and adventure of making a living and have perforce put the romance and adventure of young love behind them as a *fait accompli*, it is surprising that our Hollywood films still, to the exclusion of everything else, hash and rehash the old boy-girl theme, *ad infinitum et ad wearyandum*.

It is my observation, the result of much traveling about the country, that most of the mature men and many of the mature women of cities and villages alike go only to the movies when their daughters are giving a party at home, or under similar irrelevant compulsion. They very rarely go to the films because they have a compelling desire to see the picture. In my sometime capacity as peddler for a chemical concern I come into contact with all sorts and conditions of business men, from the workman on up the scale to the top executive—and I know of only very few who have the least interest in the movies. When I ask them why this is, the answer is almost always the same: they are sick of all that silly love stuff.

**T**HE motion picture companies would probably retort that they are making money, but the fact is that in making almost exclusively films which have such silly love stuff as their themes, they are overlooking a large portion of their potential audience. The American movie plan is: pretty stories, and pretty actors and actresses to play in them. The European plan, as exemplified in this one film out of many which could be mentioned, is: true to life stories, with true to life players to make them true.

Certainly not every European film follows this idea—the companies over there make hundreds of films which are just as insipid to the adult mind as are almost all of ours—but they do realize that a large part of the public cannot keep such stuff down, and act accordingly. While the average European men and women are without doubt in many ways more mature than we are, I do not believe that Europe produces more serious films than we do because it has a better audience for them. Hundreds of thousands of adults in this country habitually stay away from pictures because they can find neither entertainment nor mental stimulation in the so-called attractions down on Main Street.

**S**OME philosophers say that if you believe anything long enough it will eventually become a fact—and this is nowhere better demonstrated than in the motion picture industry today. For years Hollywood has insistently believed that the average mental age of motion picture audiences is around twelve years. At first this was nonsense on the face of it, but after years of supporting this patently fallacious theory by producing films aimed only at the twelve year old intelligence, the fiction has become fact indeed—for the very simple reason that the product has driven away all former members of the audience whose mental age happened to be somewhat higher.

No industry, not even the very unorthodox industry of making motion pictures, is properly conducted unless it sells its product to the greatest number of people it can economically reach. The fact that the vast majority

of people can only afford a low-priced car does not prevent the automobile industry from manufacturing Cadillacs and Lincolns. Each type of car aims at a particular purse. In the film industry the cost of the product to the consumer does not have to be considered, but the type of product should be. Yet, while here, too, there is more than one kind of customer in the potential market, the film industry limits itself to one type of product for one type of mind.

Films need not be arty or esoteric to appeal to adults. Just a few pictures which now and then deal with the blood and bones of life instead of being the pictorialized wish-fulfillment of a nation of dewy dreamers, would soon bring a mass of disgusted men and women back from their newspapers to the box office.

### Miss Borue Writes Mr. Briskin

Dear Mr. Briskin:

**I**'VE never met you, unless you've been to some of the parties given by Eddie Proskins. He works at your studio—in the property department. But I guess you've never been there. I know it's pretty fresh of me to write to you this way, too, without ever being introduced—but, honestly, Mr. Briskin, I just felt I *had* to.

You see, some of the girls who live at the Studio Club, where I do, were talking about *The Plough and the Stars*—you remember, that Irish picture you made?—and I don't agree with what they said, Mr. Briskin, at all. So I just felt I had to write to you and thank you for making the picture the way I liked it, anyway. Do you want to know why—I mean why I'm writing to you? Oh, not that about not being introduced! Silly! That's just the proper thing to say. I'm really writing because you told Sam Pfeffer—he's a cutter at your studio—that you really made pictures not for *intelligent* people at all, but just for people like the girl he was at the preview of the Fred Astaire picture with! Funny? Oh, but you might not see the joke if I didn't explain. I was that girl, Mr. Briskin!

I guess I've wasted enough of your time with just a girl's chatter. I'm really writing about the picture—honest. Not trying to get a date or a dinner or anything. And that's why I'm writing it to the SPECTATOR, and not to you. So I guess you wouldn't have a chance to take me to *dinner* after all—even if you wanted to—unless you asked Mr. Beaton where I live. Oh, but I've already told you! I forgot. The Studio Club!

Oh, yes—that's a reminder. We were talking about your picture at the Club, and one of the girls said, right out at table: "It stinks." Well! If you think I was going to stand for that! I said, "You keep your mouth shut, Mary Brady, or I'll slap it shut!"—Oh, no I didn't.

**T**HAT'S a line I had in a picture once. I couldn't be that *rude* Mr. Briskin—even to someone who didn't like your picture! I just couldn't!

So I said, "Is that so?" I said. That's all I said. "A lot you know about making pictures, Mary Brady," I said. "You've only been in one." That just about stopped her. And I wouldn't have said anything more if she

hadn't said she'd read the play—*The Plough and the Stars*, I mean. I had an answer for that one. "So has Mr. Briskin, I guess," I said. And that stopped her. But not really, of course. I mean it left her without anything very intelligent to say for a long while. But she said plenty that wasn't intelligent. She said, "How do you know?" for one thing. "How do I know?" I screamed back at her, "He made the *picture*, didn't he?" And that really stopped her—but only for a second or two. They were all laughing so loud she couldn't say anything else until we all left the dining room and went into the living room to sit down and listen to the radio and talk.

And please remember, Mr. Briskin, she started it—even after we got in *there*. She said, "Why'd he leave half the first act out? It explains the whole damned thing." I couldn't think for a moment what to say, so I said, "Is that so?" And she came right back at me, "Yes, that's so," she said. "It tells why they were all living under one roof, and it had all that swell comedy between the young Covey and old Uncle Peter, and it let us in on the secret that Fluther was a carpenter and that Mrs. Gogan had a tongue like a snake-bite."

**W**ELL! You can imagine how I felt after she said *that*, Mr. Briskin! I just felt bad, that's all. I didn't know what to do—to restrain myself, I mean. I felt just like going right up and scratching her eyes out for one thing. But I got hold of myself, just in time, and came right back at her with this. "Well," I said, "I think the first of the picture was just too beautiful. Poor Mrs. Clitheroe! And that beautiful line of real poetry she spoke, that one, you know, about 'Men must fight, but the weepin' will be left to the wimmin!'"

That held her for a while. But just as I was about to bury myself in Sid Skolsky's column again in the *Citizen*, she ups with: "Did you know anywhere in the picture that Mrs. Clitheroe was going to have a child?" "I should say not—" I said, and then I saw my mistake. She was hinting at the play again. Always bringing that up. You'd have thought they had to have *it* to make the *picture*. "No," I said, "you wouldn't know it from the picture, and good reason—Mr. Hays wouldn't let them show her having a child on the screen!"

**T**HAT stopped her so long while they were laughing that I got almost through Skolsky.

"They killed the finest Irish play in years," she said after a while. "Killed it! Look at the stuff they cut out between Bessie and Mrs. Gogan and Fluther and the young Covey and the prostitute—"

"Mary Brady, you ought to be ashamed, mentioning that word!" I said. "And anyway, Barbara Stanwyck was married, because you just said she was going to have a child, and besides, her name was Mrs. Clitheroe—and I think if we have to talk about any woman in the play, we could talk about her. You seem to forget that she had some of the loveliest scenes I've ever seen on the talking screen. She tried to get into the postoffice while the battle was going on and all those men in Irish uniforms were dying for their country."

"Not in the play, she didn't," Mary said.

"Well, she did in the *picture!*" I came right back at her, "and she showed a real mother's and wife's love when she ran to Preston Foster—I mean Mr. Clitheroe—and threw her arms around his neck and kissed him in front of everybody while that actor Neil Fitzgerald was dying!" I said. "Love," I said, "is more than *all!*"

She couldn't think of an answer to that. She just said, "What about bringing those Irish actors all the way from the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, and then cutting them out? I couldn't even find Mr. McCormick!"

**W**ELL, that was a funny one! But it made me mad! "Say," I said, "don't you know they bring actors over all the time from the Pasadena Playhouse in Pasadena and they cut them out and leave them on the cutting room floor? What's a few actors from Dublin—wherever that is? A picture has to be *cut*, you know!" That absolutely sent her out of the room. She just got up and went out without saying a word. That is, she didn't say anything to me. I just heard her mutter something to herself as she went out, like the bad girl always does in a picture when the good girl is walking out with her boy friend—did I ever tell you I'm practising awful hard and all the time to play bad girl parts, Mr. Briskin?—but, anyway, to get back to what she muttered as she went by me and out of the room. It sounded like she muttered:

"This one ought to be cut right up the center."

*Mr. Briskin!*

Yours respectfull, (Signed) Briane Borue (Just an extra girl).

## MURDEROUS MISALLIANCE

*By James Brant*

*"Dr. Dale, who examined one hundred and fifteen pictures, said that the heroes were responsible for thirteen good sound murders, the villains and villainesses for thirty. Heroines had only one to their credit. Altogether, fifty-four murders were committed, to say nothing of fifty-nine cases of mere assault and battery. Thirty-six hold-ups were staged, and twenty-one kidnappings. Forty-three crimes were attempted. Four hundred and six were actually committed."—A Clipping.*

**C**RIME is rampant. Criminals hold the public eye. The talk of the nation is crime and criminals, the lust of sex, the dreams of drugs. Purveyors of the dregs of life are in a morbid ecstasy. With the silent signs of soundless talk they broadcast hellish practices, in fact and in fiction, covered and open, with myriad tales out of the depths of darkness until this human life takes on the counterpart of hell itself.

The buzzard public gorges on the carrion of soundless talk, the dead decay of minds and morals. It buys with the last thin dime in the little purse. Feed it to them and take them for what they have. The policy behind the gain of gold.

A blonde beauty and a black buck. A creature from centuries of civilized progress; an animal but once removed from the jungle forest. Into the dreams of the

fair-skinned creature comes a whispering imp of sex. Into desire slithers a demon of lust and the thrill of fleshly contact. The carnal weasels fasten on and suck the finer instincts dry. A union. Lust in black and white. The blonde creature's hot desire gratified, begins the working of an inborn feeling bred down through generations. Revulsion needle-pricks feeling and the little hurt becomes a grievous sore, swelling to fiery inflammation.

**T**HERE comes a blood-red imp out of lower hell, cloaked in revulsion awaiting the opening of the folds. They open and there is a beckoning to relief. The imp of Satan, inviting and enticing, offers the sharp-pointed glittering steel, the subtle fine-grained, dust, the corded-silk necklace.

The fair one sickens of the odor of the jungle and the glistening animal skin. Barriers bar flight; daily living is a prison. The turmoil and conflict of instinctive longing and stark reality engenders desperation. Hell and itsimps of torture pervade a living death.

On a still, dark night with a hidden moon the fair White eases away from the side of the slumbering Black. Softly to the floor, tense listening. His sleep is heavy, the soporific dose has worked. There is quiet, hurried dressing and all is ready for leaving. No suitcase to carry to attract attention; no bundle, no package. They have been cached in readiness for the night-time flight.

Stealthy steps approach the crib where sleeps the mongrel of a misalliance. A soft, firm palm shuts off an outcry and a thin, strong cord entwines the little throat; a twist and breathing stops; a tight constriction and the little body's veins no longer pulse. There is a stillness as of death: no sound from the heavy sleeper; no rustle of leaves through the open window; no creak of boards; only straightening of a body, unseen in the gloom, unheard in the stillness.

Stealthy steps go quietly but surely to the dresser. The greased drawer soundlessly opens and two white hands seek something hidden underneath the folded garments. Tense and alert, a shadowy form moves noiselessly, yet quickly, to the side of the form in sleeping stupor. A listening and a poise for act or flight. The nostrils sense an odor; there comes a hardening of heart and muscle, a pencil light and a glistening flash. A moment tarrying to see if all is ended. The sleeper sleeps no more, his heartbeats stilled. It is over and done and the door beckons. Flight! Out and away from the torture cham-

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ber along the dark side streets and through cluttered alleys to a refuge.

There were miserable days of torturing fear and sleepless nights listening for creeping steps and awaiting the heavy hand and the polished bracelets. Exhaustion brought troubled sleep and sweaty dreams of a barred chamber and a dangling rope. Escape in time but always haunting fear. Always moving; no rest, no peace. Money for existence but none for happiness. A winding trail through muck and murk to a foreign clime and work in a cabaret or dance-hall.

**D**AYS and nights in a whirl of madness. Bitter memory, an enveloping sadness of heart and a fading of physical charm betoken the approaching end. Drugs, the brothel and the street. A hag that was once a creature fair and beautiful. A soul brought into being without its knowing why or whence and cursed by society to an earthly tempest of suffering that the rottenest hell of creed or sect could not surpass.

The majestic trees of mighty forests that hold so much of worth and value are murdered for the pulp and paper to broadcast to all humanity the hellish crimes and evils that cause suffering untold and contaminate those who even so much as touch in contact. Writers and publishers, cynical and immersed in their own conceit, favor crime and corruption as the most important activity in human life. By their standard a story out of hell is the grandest work of art that printed page can tell. They surfeit the public with the dead rot and the fulsome practices that breed and produce only suffering, misery and unhappiness and they call themselves, so help us all, the Fourth Estate, presumably an estate of superior quality and excellence.

The motion picture producers, indulging in very much the same practice, in order to satisfy and gratify their greatness should term themselves the Fifth Estate.

**A**ND that part of the apathetic public who would prefer to read, see and hear less of polluted society, business and politics and more of the finer qualities and virtues of man should, perhaps, just perhaps, be referred to as the Minus One Estate.

The motion picture is language. It tells a story or a fact. No printed page or human voice can do aught more. It has a broader and a deeper appeal than either print or voice because its audience may be receptive without effort, or with very little. It has a wider field, for the illiterate can view it understandingly and so can the deaf.

When the splendid force and quality of the motion picture is partner to the portrayal of that which induces thought and incites practice of those passions and evils which destroy character and undermine society and government, there is a misalliance that shall surely bring a day of reckoning.

There is beauty in virtue and there is drama in effort. There is inspiration in the accomplishment of good and there is laughter in wholesome comedy. There is happiness in the decent things of life and there is peace in

honor. Wisdom and integrity in high places contribute to the stability of government and the security of material wealth.

When motion pictures portray such qualities, like and similar, they will do something of worth for the nation, and if the American Public were not a sucker public they would have been forced into such channels long ere this.

**C**HILD actors in greater numbers are being put under contract by studios. If the idea behind the movement is to make pictures more appealing to children in an effort to bring them back to film theatres as they attended them in silent days, it is doomed to failure. A recent survey revealed that boys think all child actors are sissies, although girls do not object to them. The appeal of children in screen offerings is to adults, and therein lies their box-office value. Their appeal is elemental; it takes us back to our own childhood, makes us live again in the little people we see on the screen. And children are the most accomplished actors we have. Nine-tenths of their performances being put over by the camera makes them tough competition for adults playing with them. A good child actor always can steal a scene from the best adult actor. Every time I see Dickie Moore on the screen I want to adopt him, but it never yet has occurred to me that it would be pleasant to adopt Vic. McLaglen or Wally Beery.

## DONALD WOODS

Donald Woods demonstrates again that he is one of the young men from whom we can expect much. He is another whom a good appearance helps, but it is the pleasing personality back of it that counts.

—WELFORD BEATON,  
Hollywood Spectator.

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*Says Writers Are Simple Souls*

.... REVIEWED ....

CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS    ★    SAN QUENTIN    ★    TOP OF THE TOWN  
THE HIT PARADE    ★    ANOTHER DAWN    ★    FIFTY ROADS TO TOWN  
CHARLIE CHAN AT THE OLYMPICS    ★    THINK FAST, MR. MOTO  
ALLA EN EL RANCHO GRANDE

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THE SCREEN INDUSTRY CAN SERVE ITSELF BEST BY SERVING SCREEN ART MORE

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# **ROY DEL RUTH**

**DIRECTOR**

**1936-1937**

**RELEASES**

**Born to Dance**

**Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer**

**On the Avenue**

**20th Century-Fox**

**Private Number**

**20th Century-Fox**

**In Production**

**Broadway Melody of 1937**

**Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer**

**Under Contract to 20th Century-Fox**



Compliments  
of  
Sid Silvers



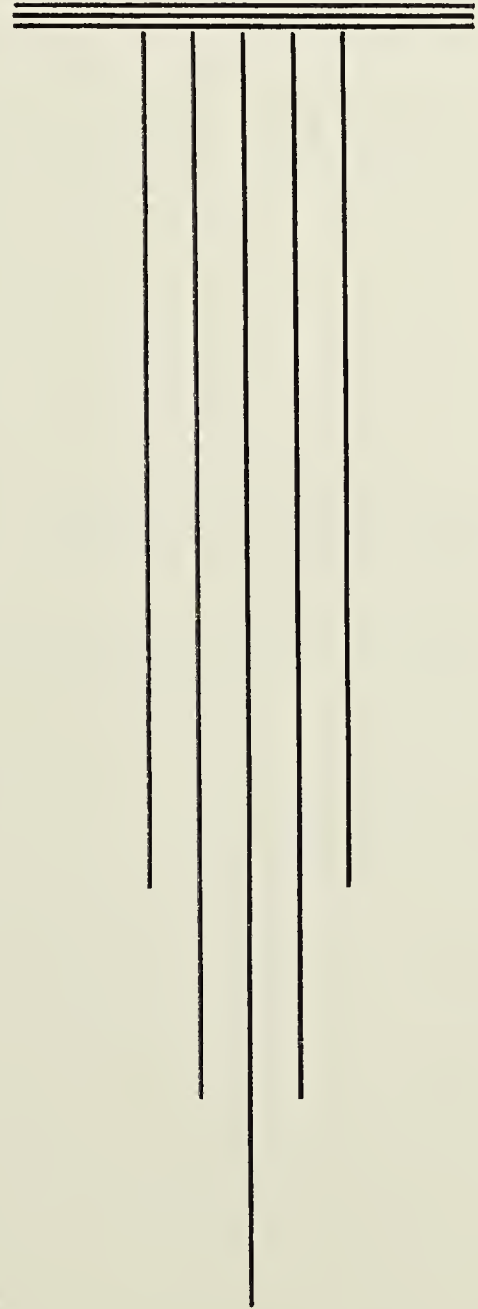
MAL ST. CLAIR

Directing

She Had to Eat

for

Twentieth Century-Fox





**CLARENCE  
BROWN**

**Directing**

**for**

**Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer**



**CURRENT PRODUCTION**

**MADAME WALEWSKA**

**Starring**

**Greta Garbo**



**John G. Blystone**

**Directed**

**WOMAN CHASES MAN**

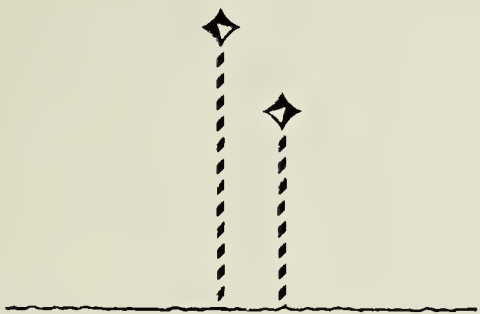
**A Sam Goldwyn Production**

**Current Release**

**23½ Hours Leave**

**A Douglas MacLean Production**





# CASEY ROBINSON

SCREEN PLAYS

CURRENT:

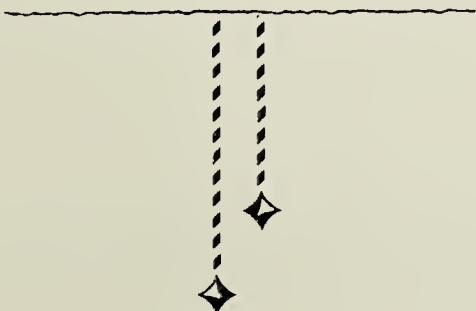
## CALL IT A DAY

IN PRODUCTION:

### A LESLIE HOWARD PICTURE

IN PREPARATION:

## TOVARICH



CONGRATULATIONS  
TO  
WELFORD BEATON  
and  
THE SPECTATOR  
ON ITS  
ELEVENTH BIRTHDAY

## WALTER CATLETT

20th Century-Fox



**JAMES STEWART**

**AL JOLSON**

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**HUGH HERBERT**



From the

# Editor's Easy Chair



**T**HE motion picture industry still is so young that eleven years constitute a big slice of its life. For that time the Spectator has endeavored to serve it. Never has it been influenced by any motive other than the improvement of screen entertainment and the material prosperity and intellectual contentment of those who work in and for pictures. It has definite views, but no axes to grind; it owes allegiance only to its principles. What it thinks, it states. It does not expect you to share all its views, but it does ask you to believe in the sincerity with which it expresses them.

Today it celebrates its eleventh birthday, and some of its friends are marking the occasion by generous use of its advertising pages. To them, our heartfelt thanks. It is revenue from advertising upon which all screen publications depend to make their continued existence possible. To earn such patronage—to create in you the desire that it should live—has been the aim of the Spectator. We are grateful for the degree in which this aim has been accomplished.

\* \* \*

**P**RODUCERS are realizing more than ever before the value of strong supporting casts. Stock companies in the various studios are being enlarged in order to assure producers strong forces of supporting players will be available when needed. Perhaps this means a beginning on the part of Hollywood to develop an asset now going to waste. In almost every picture you see there is at least one bit done brilliantly by some player whose name as often as not is not listed in the cast. The star's performance consists of nothing but a succession of well done bits which center our attention on him or her. If our unknown player were given a succession of bits, if when he is facing the camera he were given the same degree of attention accorded the star, it surely would follow that his performance would be as good as the star's and attract as much attention. And if the unknown were given such opportunities in three or four good pictures in a row, he would become a star. In any six-months' parade of film attractions one can spot scores of potential stars, players with peculiar talents, both inherent and acquired, which could be turned into

money in film box-offices. Of course, it is rank heresy to state it, but it is a fact that Hollywood producers know very little about the box-office. All they know is what it has accepted. They are entirely ignorant of what it *will* accept.

\* \* \*

**T**HE public pays its money for only one thing—entertainment. The easiest way to satisfy it is to have a beautiful girl play a pleasant part on the screen, and show the various steps in the progress of a handsome young fellow's infatuation for her; the box-office has responded agreeably to it and producers are afraid to make radical changes in the diet. They overlook the broader fact that the public in its desire for entertainment will accept anything which entertains it. Make an old man or an old woman entertaining and the public will respond as readily as it does to the beautiful girl and the handsome boy. Hollywood moans over the paucity of star material and is unaware there is available to it enough potential star material to make it unnecessary for any one star to appear in more than two or three pictures in any one year. It thinks too much in terms of acting and not enough in terms of personalities. It is too impatient to build stars, to give character actors opportunities to develop box-office strength. It thinks only of today and has no thought for the film industry's tomorrow. Darryl Zanuck is quoted by the press in the absurd statement that it costs one million dollars to discover and make a star. The public both discovers and makes stars and pays for the privilege of first discovering them when they appear in company with previously made stars. Stars are made by opportunities to reveal star stature. If Hollywood had more of the pioneering spirit which has been the force behind all industrial progress, the whole place would be overrun with stars.

\* \* \*

**M**ENTAL MEANDERINGS: A Baltimore paper refers to me as a "fearless" critic. Fearless? Huh! In summer I'd like to go around in shorts, but I'm afraid to. . . . You can spell the bark of Bo Beep, the Peke—ouff. . . . One of our best garden friends is a mockingbird with one leg; quite a friendly fellow who likes to eat raisins. Ever try raisins to lure mockingbirds to your trees? You should. . . . The most interesting American city I have visited is San Antonio, Texas. . . . I always can find a piece of cake in a container which sits atop the refrigerator—and a piece of Mrs. Spectator's cake is some-

thing to find. . . . Seven lines on this page measure one inch; sixty-five words to the inch; 1170 words to the page; 16,400 words in a SPECTATOR of usual size; I write mornings, fiddle around in the afternoons, attend previews evenings. . . . On a marquee—Una Merkel and Guy Kibbee—Don't Tell the Wife. Why, Una! . . . Real estate development near Universal City has alluring title of Hidden Village. Big signs all over the place tell you where it is. . . . If a certain two-story house in San Fernando Valley disappeared suddenly, I never would be able to find my way home at night; I turn to the left at the first intersection beyond it. . . . Our hollyhocks are displaying extraordinary vigor. . . . If I ever accomplished anything for which I was entitled to a reward in the way of public recognition, I would like to have a rose named after me. . . . We had one duck given us; she seemed lonely so I got another; paid sixty cents for it raw, which is about one-fifth what you would pay for it at the Brown Derby cooked, and it seems to me a duck full of life should be worth more than one full of stuffing; anyway, Alexandra and Sophie are leading contented lives and present us with two eggs per day, which, neighbors Hal Wallis and Hugh Herbert tell me is one hundred per cent capacity for ducks. This morning I lifted the box in which are placed their food trays, and found a most astonishing number of black bugs under it; must consult Hal and Hugh again. . . . Phoebe, my spaniel, is intelligent; after only two tries she has ceased attempting to catch the occasional jack rabbit we encounter on our walks through the dewy, blossomed and perfumed glories of San Fernando Valley in the early morning.

\* \* \*

**T**HE other day a producer told me in all seriousness that the greatest danger facing the film industry is a story shortage. At the present rate of production, he argued, in two or three more years all the possible stories will have been screened. I agreed with him. I even went further: I told him by that time artists would find nothing new to paint, authors no more books to write, musicians no more songs to compose, poets no new thoughts to put in verse, sculptors no more ideas to express in marble, architects nothing original to express in buildings; in fact, I went so far I had him begging me to stop and agreeing that perhaps he was wrong. True, there are no new stories to tell on the screen, but there are a million ways of telling the old ones over again. A thousand different artists can paint the same millstream, and each painting will be an individual work of art. A thousand different film producers can use the same basic thought and each picture will be an individual work of screen art. So long as creative brains function, the screen will have more stories than it can use.

\* \* \*

**L**OOKING back over the eleven years of its existence, the SPECTATOR would not be human if it did not take pride in some of the things it has done. For instance, it is the only publication printed anywhere that has given publicity to Marsha Hunt's nose. Those of you who have seen this sweet and wholesome youngster in Paramount pictures will recall the charming upturn of the tip of her nose. The first time I saw it, I put over my review of

the picture, "Leave Marsha's Nose Alone!" and warned all plastic surgeons to keep their hands off. As a matter of fact, there are not enough turned-up noses on the screen to lend variety to the feminine beauty it brings to us. The SPECTATOR never lost its interest in Marsha's nose even though I never had seen her except on the screen. The other day I was lunching on the Paramount lot and my roving eye caught the tip of an upturned nose. There was no mistaking it. I went over and introduced myself to Marsha. It was a moment fraught with trepidation. I never before had championed a nose. Would its owner resent my presumption? But Marsha's smile was reassuring, her eyes cordial. She told me people say to her, "Marsha, you really must do something about that nose," and her reply always is, "Read the SPECTATOR. A nose good enough for it is good enough for me." So you see the SPECTATOR has something to show for its eleven years of existence.

\* \* \*

**T**HE screen's imaginary troubles never seem to be remedied. Producers tell us now the public is demanding new faces; studio scouts are engaged in nationwide search for new people to put in pictures. It is an old situation. Eleven years ago, in the first SPECTATOR to appear, I referred to the then prevalent clamor for new faces, and remarked, "But if producers cannot get new faces they might try the expedient of presenting the old ones with new expressions on them." I think that still is good advice. The film industry is beset by a lot of weird fancies and perhaps the weirdest of all is that the public wants new faces on the screen. What it wants on the screen is what it wants in its homes—old friends. The industry would be twice as well off if it had half the number of players to draw from as it has now. What it needs most of all is a better understanding of human nature.

\* \* \*

**R**ANDOM THOUGHTS: The number of people who complain about how much income tax they have to pay is exceeded by those who complain because they have none to pay. . . . In the newspaper business all my life, a constant reader of them, I lately have been reading only the motion picture news they carry. I refuse to disturb my mind by reading of war, strikes, riots, murders, airplane crashes, divorces, Roosevelt's ambition to be King Franklin the First of America. The one-legged mocking bird that hops about the yard and joins the other feathered guests who chatter over the grain I put out for them, is of more importance to me than all the grief the delivery boys throw over my gate every morning. . . . I know of no one in Hollywood who has a sounder knowledge of all the elements of motion pictures than Karl Freund, cameraman extraordinary. I still recall the superb photography in *Last Laugh*, *Variety*, *Metropolis*, *Golem*, his pictorial masterpieces which came to us from abroad before he came here. The mood of his most recent release, *The Good Earth*, is set and sustained by his photography. . . . I believe I view a motion picture as the average audience does; I am not an expert on anything, music, set designing, photography, dancing, singing, meaning to me only the emotional reaction they prompt, their technical significance being over my head. . . . Ernst



Lubitsch shooed me onto stage 8, Paramount lot, to see his *Angel* set; whole lower floor of an old English castle whose windows command extensive views of garden and forest; one of those amazing accomplishments of the extraordinary geniuses in studio art departments . . . . Phoebe, the spaniel, sitting on her haunches scratching her left ear and at the same time yawning extensively; spring has got her . . . . Luncheon under the pepper tree and near the long arm of the climbing rose which distributes fresh foliage and budding blooms along twenty feet of fence-top; the silence of the country broken only by the song of the birds; the city a million miles away—that's life, comrade!

\* \* \*

**WHEN** *A Family Affair* was previewed, I missed it as something else was showing the same night. Paul Jacobs reviewed it, praising it highly. To catch it, I went early to another preview and heartily second Paul's praise of it. It has the homespun flavor more pictures should have. The understanding direction of George Seitz and the evenness of all the performances make the most of Kay Van Ripper's story material. I have one quarrel, however, with the author. Lionel Barrymore, whose renomination for the judgeship he holds is imperiled by his enemies, seeks to confound them at the nominating convention. We are not told what his plans are; all we know is that he mysteriously disappears on the eve of the convention and is not present when it opens. Finally he appears, confounds his enemies and the picture ends happily. To my way of thinking, that is not good story construction. Lionel really is the story and the audience should have gone with him on the mysterious trip to secure the documents which ultimately he reads at the convention. As we have it, the suspense arises from wondering what has happened to him. More legitimate suspense would have been attained by our knowledge of what he was going to do causing us to wonder how his enemies were going to take it when he sprung his surprise. A good dramatic law is that which says you may fool characters but never audiences. In this picture we are placed in the same position as the enemies of the man who carries our sympathy, instead of remaining at his side while he is fighting his battle. The convention sequence would have been more entertaining if we had known all the time just what was going to happen.

\* \* \*

**THE** people who are agitating at Washington for the passage of a law to keep foreign actors out of the United States, would better serve those now in motion pictures if they would urge the passage of one to keep even American players from coming to Hollywood until all those here now are making a living.

\* \* \*

**A** DIRECTOR, riding by, saw me writing in my garden, hitched his horse to my gatepost, accommodated his spine to the back of a deeply cushioned wicker chair, helped himself to a pipeful of tobacco, and we smoked and blinked at one another in the gentle sunshine of a perfect spring day. After a while he told me he was to start shooting next day and began to outline his story to me. He paused when he reached what I judged to be about the middle of the picture. "That's as

far as we've got it worked out," he added. "And you begin shooting tomorrow morning?" I asked. "Uh huh," he replied. The thing they were trying to get around, he explained, was what now seemed inevitable—the killing of the most sympathetic character at the end of the picture. I asked him if he had seen *Captains Courageous*. He had not. Spence Tracy, I told him, is its most sympathetic character, and in the end he drowns; but it really is a happy ending, for in course of the story Spence paints tender pictures of the good times he is going to have in heaven when he joins his fisherman father and the two ply their earthly vocation in the most fruitful spots in celestial seas. All that is necessary, I argued, was to make the ending logical and the audience would be contented with it. As a matter of fact, I argued further, there never can be a question about the ending of a story. If properly written, all the preceding incidents can point to but one logical finish. The director has ridden away. First, he used my telephone to catch his producer and advise him to kill the sympathetic character. As I fill my pipe again it gives me a righteous glow to reflect I have started the day being party to a really nice murder.

\* \* \*

**TWENTY-TWO** years ago Jack Conway directed *Come Through* for Universal. It cost \$14,000 to make and grossed \$785,000. That is the greatest percentage over production cost that Universal has had in the way of profits. Today Jack Conway is breaking a Metro record. Last year he directed *Libeled Lady*. It cost \$535,000. To date it has grossed \$3,250,000. That is the greatest percentage of profit a Metro picture has earned. One of the earliest big money-makers was *The Miracle Man*. It cost \$137,000 and grossed somewhere around four and a half millions.

\* \* \*

**CHARLIE ROGERS**, Universal boss, has given orders that Federal Theatre centers all over the country are to be searched for character actors. The likely ones are to be sent to Hollywood. It really is too bad no one has told Charlie about Hollywood Boulevard. It is a nice, broad thoroughfare and on both sides of it every day can be found more character actors than Universal could use in five years of picture making. They are just strolling along, looking in shop windows, hoping casting directors will tap their shoulders. If Charlie really is in such desperate need of players that he feels he must spend money in spreading a nationwide alarm in the hope it will yield them, I am willing to help him out at no cost by sending him the names, addresses, telephone numbers and picture records of two hundred of them already on the ground.

\* \* \*

According to figures recently published by the *National Box-office Digest*, Hunt Stromberg tops all the unit producers with his pictures, scoring a box-office rating of 182 per cent.

\* \* \*

During 1936 the New York State Censor Board made 522 eliminations from pictures for indecency.

# Screen Art and the Film Business

By the Editor

(The fourth of a series of special articles on the fundamental principles of motion picture production.)

**N**O matter how fundamentally sound the abstract reasoning underlying a discussion of the screen as an art, it has no practical value if it ignores the demands of the screen as an industry. We cannot deny to those disposed to indulge in it the right to regard it solely as an art, to discuss it as such, to analyze it, to isolate its elements and do what they will with each of them; but unless the welfare of the film box-office be the focal point of discussions of motion pictures, the welfare of the art cannot be advanced. In Hollywood, which has no corporate identity of its own and is a term used to designate that part of Los Angeles and adjacent communities in which pictures are made, there is an investment of upward of one hundred million dollars in physical equipment necessary to film production. In the United States the number of operating film theatres is approaching the twenty-thousand mark, and throughout the world there are approximately seventy-five thousand more in operation. The aggregate theatre investment can be computed only in terms of billions of dollars.

As an industry, motion pictures take a high place among those of the United States. The stock of the producing companies is traded in on exchanges, is held by a vast number of people, has a market value which must be protected. An individual might spend his own money in experimenting with screen art, but a company whose chief concern must be for the welfare of its shareholders, must approach the art from the standpoint of its ability to produce dividends. On my shelves are many books whose authors reveal an intelligent grasp of the fundamentals of the screen as an art, who write entertainingly, searchingly and helpfully on film esthetics, but fail to reveal consideration of film finances.

**T**HE perfect motion picture can be defined easily: A story told entirely in visual images without the aid of spoken or printed words. There you have the screen in the highest exemplification of its status as an art. And such speechless, wordless pictures are possible to make. But their making requires the infinite patience all art creations require if they are to be perfect examples of their several arts. In 1936 the people of the United States paid many millions of dollars to see the kind of screen entertainment offered it. Among the pictures shown there was not one perfect example of screen art. If film producers had exercised the patience required to make their pictures perfect, production would have been slowed down to a point that would have left the theatres closed half the year because of lack of attractions. In 1936 Hollywood made four hundred and eighty feature-length pictures, more than one and one-half for each working day of the year. All the film studios in the world could not produce that many perfect pictures in any one year.

But why perfection when the public is willing to purchase something less? Before we can bemoan the lack of perfection we must answer that question in a manner that would satisfy a banker, would make a shareholder in a film company content with smaller, if any, dividends. Keeping the supply of screen entertainment abreast of the theatre demand is a commercial requirement to which the art must yield. Our problem, then, in these discussions is to determine how the art can be served best in a manner which will affect the supply least.

**O**UR first quest is for the quality in the present production which induces eighty million people in the United States to patronize film theatres each week. That is something no other form of entertainment has succeeded in doing. We find its root in the silent pictures which reflected a steady growth in the attendance habit from the inception of screen entertainment to the time when audible dialogue was introduced. The early talkies touched, but did not maintain, a peak of one hundred and twenty million paid admissions per week. Today they have dropped to eighty millions.

In the first article in this series (SPECTATOR February 27) we discussed briefly some of the elements which gave the screen its worldwide popularity. We then were pointing out the differences between screen art and stage art. Now let us take one of the differences and discuss it more fully as an individual element. I refer to the part imagination plays in our absorption in a motion picture and its place in our discussion of liberties, for commercial considerations, producers are justified in taking with screen art. We referred to it briefly in our opening discussion which was a general survey of the whole cinematic situation. We now will deal with it more comprehensively.

**A**S the silent pictures developed, it captured the fancy of the world to a degree no other form of entertainment had succeeded in attaining. The stage, with its plastic characters, the reality of its spoken lines, and the actuality of the space in which it moved, left little more than the element of time to the active play of the imagination. Emerson defines imagination to be "the use which reason makes of the material world." The stage reached into the material world and assembled behind the footlights real people to tell its stories and real objects to dress its sets. Its third dimension also was real. The imagination did not have to exert itself to accept stage people as the characters they were playing. In short, the stage is an art of reality that leans but lightly upon the imagination.

The screen is an art of the *illusion* of reality. None of its elements is real. It is composed entirely of shadows. Its characters are shadows which are real only in the imagination of the beholder. It photographs the material world which to us becomes material again only through the agency of our imaginations, which provide also the third dimension which the art actually lacks. It employs

no colors, presenting only gradations from white to black as the materials the imagination must use in painting such pictures as it can see on the screen.

"I like that shade of pink," says one screen character to another whose gown photographs white, and immediately our imaginations supply the color and we see the gown as pink.

**I**MAGINATION is the use of our picturing sense. A man imagines he is a great orator. He pictures himself on a platform, thousands below him, cheering his oratory. One does not imagine in the abstract. A jockey cannot imagine he is winning a great race without seeing with his mind's eye the competing horses and the roaring crowds in the grandstand. He uses these impressions of the material world to dress the sets his imagination occupies when it stages its play. The scope of our imaginings is limited to the boundaries set by our own pictorial sense. A man who can picture anything, can imagine anything. He who can picture nothing, can imagine nothing.

As we live our lives we have more imaginary joys than real ones, more imaginary troubles than real troubles. The imagination, therefore, is the biggest thing we have. Obviously he who can enjoy it most is he who can give it widest range, he who can provide most settings for his mental plays. If he could paint more pictures he could imagine still more things that pleased him. If I cannot imagine what a tennis match looks like, I cannot imagine myself beating the world's champion; but if you can overcome my deficiency by supplying what I lack and presenting me with a picture showing the contestants in action, my mental powers would have to be limited greatly if I cannot imagine it is I at whose hands the champion is suffering defeat. Perhaps I know the game but am not thinking in terms of tennis. You bring me the picture and immediately I fill it with incidents which please me most. I could have pictured it for myself, but I had not thought of it. It is the picture which prompts my mental action in imagining I am playing tennis.

**T**HE silent picture gained ascendancy as an entertainment force because it assembled for the imagination to toy with the greatest store of material that man's ingenuity could discover. It relieved our pictorial sense of the necessity of fashioning its own pictures. It assembled the material objects composing the pictures, presented them on a flat and lifeless surface, to be used for our enjoyment to the extent our imaginations could people them with life and action. It brought us sunsets in light and shade, clouds which had form but neither depth nor color, and our imaginations made them glow with the brilliant hues that memory gathered from all the real sunsets we had seen. It brought us thousands of still pictures and ran them in such quick succession before our eyes that we imagined motion and saw the characters move.

Let us imagine a scene in a silent picture. An orchestra supplies music to keep our aural sense occupied. If it was selected wisely and played properly, we are unconscious of it, but it is of value to us in that it stimu-

lates our imaginations and so exaggerates the emotional value of scenes we respond to them more readily than we could without the stimulus of the music. In the foreground the hero stands beside an automobile, taking leave of the heroine. You, being a woman, remember a spring night, a fountain and the perfume of honeysuckle; a man asked you something that made you think his voice was sweet music, and your imagination bestows the same voice upon the man who stands by the automobile on the screen. I, being a man, recall a night when the full moon seemed about to fall out of the black sky into the Promenade des Anglais at Nice; the gentle lapping of the indolent Mediterranean—a voice that whispered in my ear, and when the girl speaks on the screen I hear again the whisper. What the two say is of no importance. We supply the speeches, and although yours in no way resembles mine, each of us is satisfied because he imagines the words that make the scene perfect.

**A**..DOG crosses the background and stops to bark at something. You hear the bark as the roar that comes from your mastiff; I hear it as the voice of my cocker spaniel. Silently the automobile heads into the background, up a road which disappears over a hill. It gets farther away, grows small and finally is only a tiny spot as it sinks out of sight.

What have we seen? The automobile did not get one inch farther away from us from the time it was a big thing in the foreground until it seemed to be a tiny thing in the deep background. All the time it was on the same flat surface. We did not see a dog in the background because there is no background, and what we saw was the photograph of a dog. There were no boy and girl on the screen engaged in conversation. We saw only shadows, and shadows cannot talk. Still we experienced pleasurable emotional reaction as we viewed the scene. The pleasure was supplied by our imaginations which reacted in our several different ways to the suggestions made by the screen.

In other words, we were entertained solely by our imaginations.

*What we saw on the screen did not entertain us. We got from it only what our imaginations put into it.*

**S**CREEN art intrigued us from the start because it had no voice and was forced to use the sign language. Its signs were pictures of what it wanted us to know, and merely as a convenience to itself and to us, it acquired the habit early in life of throwing printed words on the screen to make the meaning of some of the scenes plainer or to notify us of a change of locale. But the screen never asked us to believe it. It would show us a man writing a letter in the Australian bush, and in the fraction of a second we would see his wife reading the letter in a hotel in Switzerland. Our reason would tell us that this was impossible, but our imaginations accepted it as fact, and we became concerned only in the wife's reaction to what her husband wrote.

We derive pleasure from our esthetic creations, either imaginary or real, because each of us creates what pleases

him most. You cannot force me to enjoy yours, nor can I force you to enjoy mine. Perhaps, however, each will enjoy the other's. If we think alike, that would follow. But of this we may be certain: I always would enjoy mine, whereas it is inevitable that sometimes I would not enjoy yours. And the reverse is true.

**W**E did not enjoy all the silent pictures we saw. Our imaginations have their own reasoning powers which reject material unfit for the building of dreams, I might reject a picture you enjoyed because your imagination was equal to the task of remodeling it to suit your fancy. That is why all silent pictures made money. Each pleased one of us. The dim light of film theatres, the reposeful atmosphere, the soft music, quieted our critical senses until our imaginations accepted much that our intellects would have spurned if the medium had been an aggressive one that challenged our thoughtful consideration or tried to bulldoze our imaginations into the acquiescent acceptance of what we saw on the screen. But it did neither. It lulled us into indifference, soothed us into complacency, and we saw in it virtues it did not possess. It achieved its purpose of creating in us a perfect illusion of reality and almost anything pleased us because we willed it so.

Obviously if our imaginations created our screen entertainment, the pictures which pleased us most must have been those which left most to our imaginations. Before the advent of the sound camera, the film industry prospered enormously because it was forced to assign to our imaginations the greater portion of the burden of interpreting the entertainment the camera suggested. That is what made its product salable and sustained film industry's even level of prosperity.

**E**XCEPT for the inclusion of narrative and spoken titles, silent pictures were true to cinematic art in that they provided nothing which could be left to the imagination. If before mechanical inventions had made them a fact, a businessman could have visualized them as they grew to be, could have imagined their visual sweep, their power to stir our emotions by reducing the art of story-telling to terms of utmost simplicity and elemental appeal, he could have foretold the prosperity forced upon them by the public's ready acceptance of motion pictures as a form of entertainment. He could have reasoned for himself that intelligent production of pictures must become a profitable business.

And when sound came to Hollywood our businessman would have known that the first precaution must be to avoid using the new element in a manner disturbing to the elements responsible for the salability of the product prior to that time. Let us follow the course his reasoning would have taken.

Analysis of his product would have revealed to him its simplicity, its universal appeal, pictorial language being one all ages and all people could understand. He would have realized the restful quality of screen entertainment, its silence, its elemental manner of story-telling were box-office assets it was imperative should not be

tampered with; that the new element had to be used sparingly and intelligently to guard against its changing the whole nature of the product Hollywood had been offering for sale.

**B**UT Hollywood producers are not good businessmen, never have understood the nature of the product the public bought so eagerly, never have recognized the screen as an art. They have used the sound device in a manner to take them out of their old business and put them in a new one with an entirely different line of goods. They dismissed imagination as a factor in their merchandizing, substituted complexity for the simplicity of the screen's method of expression, substituted noise for the quiet responsible for the restful quality of their old product. Unfortunately for those who have money invested in film securities and those who patronize film theatres, Hollywood is not aware it went out of one business and into another.

Physically the making of a motion picture is a complex process, one engaging the services of experts in a wide range of crafts. Artistically it is the simplest method of expression available to any of the arts. It is not difficult to make a good motion picture. The screen can tell a story more graphically and with greater ease than it can be told in print; a minute's photography can bring to the world a picture as beautiful as one an artist takes weeks to paint. The screen is the only narrational art with the power to make its appeal directly to the emotions.

But what *is* a good motion picture? In the next SPECTATOR we will discuss that.

**T**O provide scores for some of its productions, Paramount is importing Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky, two of the greatest ultra-modern composers. Music's legitimate place on the screen is as an unobtrusive background to the picture. It can attract attention to itself only at the expense of the story. Great composers will harm more pictures than they will help. In the long run, Paramount will get farther by centering its attention on the filming of its stories. After all, its main business is making motion pictures, not giving symphony concerts. The only people who can be of value to it are those possessing picture knowledge.

\* \* \*

**I**N a neatly-prepared booklet published by the Hays organization in defense of block booking, the statement is made that "the independent theatre owner has no reason for exhibiting the product of the 'Big Eight' in his theatre except his belief that those pictures on the whole are of higher quality and greater audience appeal and, therefore, offer him better prospects of profit." Quite true, but that does not square the fact that the little exhibitor has to take the bad as well as the good from the majors and often has to pay for pictures he does not show to his audience.

\* \* \*

Wills-o-the-wisp are all right to chase when all we are looking for is exercise, but poor things in which to place hope of substantial reward.

# Some Late Previews

## Metro's Great Achievement

**CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS**, MGM. Producer, Louis D. Lighton; director, Victor Fleming; novel, Rudyard Kipling; screen play, John Lee Mahin, Marc Connelly and Dale Van Every; photographer, Harold Rosson; marine director, James Havens; musical score, Franz Waxman; original music, Franz Waxman; lyrics, Gus Kahn; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Arnold Gillespie and Edwin B. Willis; film editor, Elmo Veron. Cast: Freddie Bartholomew, Spencer Tracy, Lionel Barrymore, Melvyn Douglas, Charley Grapewin, Mickey Rooney, John Carradine, Oscar O'Shea, Jack LaRue, Walkter Kingsford, Donald Briggs, Sam McDaniels, Billy Burrud. Running time, 125 minutes.

**A SAGA** of the sea, with nature playing one of the dominant roles—one of those productions which make us wonder at the extraordinary things accompanied by the makers of our screen entertainment—a mixture of physical thrills, of marine scenes of surpassing beauty, of a human story, splendid acting—the whole bound tightly together by a golden chain of spiritual uplift—another achievement which dignifies the screen.

To Louis Lighton for his seventeen months of ceaseless labor to bring *Captains Courageous* in, goes boundless credit. Its production course was strewn with difficulties, freaks of weather, illness and accidents, but the result is worth what it cost in time, patience, worry and money. Only superlatives can do it justice as screen entertainment. John Lee Mahin, Marc Connelly and Dale Van Every made Kipling's great sea story a narrative of today which preserves all the heart interest, all the sturdy heroism, all the moral lesson which made the original a noble piece of literature. Victor Fleming's direction molded the various elements into a thrilling, engaging and moving whole. It is a picture with educational value, providing us with an intimate glimpse of the activities of the famous fleet which sets sail from Gloucester in quest of fish off the Banks of Newfoundland.

**A FEATURE** of the story is its leisurely pace. It is in no hurry to reach its end, to sacrifice impressiveness to a desire for rapid forward movement. It pauses to permit Spencer Tracy to reveal his possession of a pleasant baritone voice, and other characters to indulge in casual conversations with no direct bearing on the thread of the story, but both the singing and the inconsequential dialogue are potent elements in sustaining the mood of the story. It is one of a motherless boy being spoiled by the neglect of his extremely wealthy father whose chief interest lies in his business activities. On an ocean crossing the boy falls overboard, is picked up by a fishing dory and put aboard the sloop commanded by Lionel Barrymore. Three months' experience with the fleet makes a little man of the spoiled boy, and the return of the son he thought dead makes a real father of the businessman.

Fleming's direction has the rare quality of making each characterization a story element and not an exhibition of acting. Our attention is focused on fishermen, not on actors, the illusion of reality being sustained thereby in a greater degree than we find in the majority of screen offerings. Spencer Tracy's performance is one

which goes a long way toward justifying the opinion of those who regard him as our greatest screen actor. Freddie Bartholomew is perfect in the various phases of his characterization. Lionel Barrymore, Melvyn Douglas, Charley Grapewin, and John Carradine make notable contributions to the most satisfactory whole.

So complete is the picture, so logical in its telling of the story, so self-contained as a piece of entertainment, it was not until I referred to the cast to set down the names I mention, that I became conscious of the fact there is not a feminine name on the list. A picture which runs 125 minutes without making me aware that no woman is a part of it, has to be rich in entertainment values. And one which makes me dry my eyes before I reach for my overcoat, is, to me at least, a completely satisfactory one.

## Exceedingly Polite

**ANOTHER DAWN**, a Warner Bros. picture. Executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; directed by William Dieterle; original screen play by Laird Doyle; associate producer, Harry Joe Brown; assistant director, Frank Heath; art director, Robert Haas; photography by Tony Gaudio, A.S.C.; film editor, Ralph Dawson; dialogue director, Stanley Logan; gowns by Orry-Kelly; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; music by Erich Wolfgang Korngold. Cast: Kay Francis, Errol Flynn, Ian Hunter, Frieda Inescort, Herbert Mundin, G. P. Huntley, Jr., Billy Bevan, Clyde Cook, Richard Powell, Kenneth Hunter, Mary Forbes, Eily Malyon, Charles Austin, Joseph Tozer, Ben Welden, Spencer Teakle, David Clyde, Charles Irwin, Reginald Sheffield, Martin Garralaga, George Regas, Jack Richardson, Edward Dew, R. M. Simpson.

**QUITE** the nicest triangle treatment the screen has given us. The man Kay Francis loved before the story opens was lost in the sea over which he was flying; she was sure she never could love anyone again; she admires and respects Ian Hunter, tells him of the state of her affections, marries him with complete understanding between them. Ian is the colonel in command of a British army post at a sandy spot in the far flung empire; Errol Flynn a captain, second in command. Ian takes his bride to the desert post. You know the rest of the story. No effort is made to obscure the direction it is to take. It is obvious that Kay and Flynn will fall in love.

No objection can be made to an obvious story. It is not the plot of a story which interests us; it is the manner in which it is worked out. In this case I was glad I knew in advance what was going to happen as it permitted me to engage my attention wholly with the skill the makers of the picture displayed in doing the obvious thing in a way to make it look new. A new touch was giving us three characters who remained the best of friends to the end, even though the husband knew the feeling existing between his wife and the handsome captain. It is the politest talkie I ever saw.

**ANOTHER DAWN** is the last writing job the late Laird Doyle did for Warner Brothers. It is a brilliant piece of screen literature, some of the dialogue passages being beautiful examples of spoken English. At the end of the story the husband flies away to an inevitable fatal crash in the desert. When he had finished his script, Laird flew away and his plane crashed, putting an end

to a career that already was distinguished even though just beginning.

The picture is rich in pictorial attractiveness, Warner Brothers having done themselves proud in providing a production. That Tony Gaudio photographed it is all one need say of the quality of the camera work. The performances are of an even excellence, but in some spots the director permitted lines to be read so loudly that scenes were robbed of the intimacy they should have to develop all their values. I was impressed by the fine characterization contributed by Herbert Mundin, Billy Bevan and Clyde Cook. I doubt if the public or producers know how much pictures owe their success to the contributions of supporting players.

On the whole, the direction is up to the high standard previously established by William Dieterle. The music of Eric Wolfgang Korngold is an outstanding contribution to the production. To Harry Joe Brown, associate producer, goes credit for a thoroughly capable job.

## Republic Does Itself Proud

**THE HIT PARADE**, Republic. Producer, Nat Levine; associate producer, Colbert Clark; director, Gus Meins; story, Bradford Ropes; screen play, Bradford Ropes and Samuel Ornitz; photographer, Ernest Miller; special effects, John T. Coyle; musical supervision, Harry Grey; musical director, Alberto Colombo; film editors, Ernest Nims and Lester Orlebeck; assistant director, George Sherman. Cast: Frances Langford, Phil Regan, Louise Henry, Pert Kelton, Edward Brophy, Max Terhune, Inez Courtney, Monroe Owsley, Pierre Watkin, J. Farrell MacDonald, George Givot, Sammy White, The Gentle Maniacs, Tic Toc Girls, Carl Hoff and Orchestra, Duke Ellington and his Band, with Ivie Anderson, Eddie Duchin and his Orchestra, Molasses and January, Pick and Pat, Al Pearce and his Gang, The Voice of Experience, Ed Thorgersen, Oscar and Elmer.

**R**EPUBLIC'S most ambitious offering to date is full to the brim with entertainment. There is something in it for each type of audience. Things in it which may not entertain you probably will entertain the man in the next seat, which justifies the producers in including it. If you skip the small-type credits at the top of SPECTATOR reviews, cast your eyes on the list of names over this one and see for yourself the number of well known ones Republic has assembled in its *Hit Parade*. The picture is mounted handsomely and Ernest Miller has provided it with excellent photography. The numerous songs appear to me to average higher in musical quality than those of any other picture of the sort I have seen this season.

The outstanding feature of the production is the singing of Frances Langford. She has numerous songs and the Republic microphone brings out all the appealing richness of her voice. Even if you liked nothing else in the picture you are given enough of this girl's talent to compensate for all the rest of it. But I am sure you will like Phil Regan also, and many other hits in *The Hit Parade*. Regan, slightly awkward yet in his acting, has an engaging personality and acts his part with zest. He sings but twice, each time so pleasingly you will regret he does not sing a few more times. Pert Kelton is excellent in the role of best friend of Frances, and Inez Courtney's switchboard girl is one of the bright spots of the production. Louise Henry and Monroe Owsley have unsym-

pathetic roles and make them impressively disagreeable.

**T**HE screen play of Bradford Ropes and Sam Ornitz possesses a virtue lacking in all the other musical-dance-spectacle productions we have had lately—all the interpolations are picked up logically as the story progresses and each has story significance. For instance, each time Frances sings our interest is not confined merely to listening to her; she either is trying to get a radio job or to make good after she gets it, thus making us mental rooters for her. Regan's first song is sung for the purpose of showing Frances how to do it, and so it goes throughout the production, each interpolation, many of them excellent entertainment on their own account, doing its share in advancing the story.

In its efforts to please all tastes Republic overdoes itself in the case of the characterization given Edward Brophy. He plays an important radio sponsor, but the part is made so broadly farcical it becomes absurd from a story standpoint. A bit of intelligent comedy is that of Max Terhune, long a vaudeville entertainer and now appearing in his first important picture. He has personality and ability the screen can use. The direction of Gus Meins shows weakness only in the handling of dialogue. Lacking shading and nearly all of it being too loud, the reading of lines finally becomes irritating, Brophy's ridiculous shouting being the chief irritant.

But *The Hit Parade* will repay a visit, being quite as entertaining as the more lavish productions coming from the bigger studios.

## Harkrider Rides Again

**TOP OF THE TOWN**, Universal. Executive producer, Charles R. Rogers; associate producer, Lou Brock; director, Ralph Murphy; production associate, Sam White; original, Lou Brock; screen play, Brown Holmes and Charles Grayson; music, Jimmy McHugh; lyrics, Harold Adamson; photographer, Joseph Valentine; special effects, John P. Fulton; production designed by John Harkrider; associates, Jack Martin Smith and Albert Nickels; dance director, Charles Previn; instrumental arranger, Frank Skinner; vocal arranger, Charles Henderson; sound supervisor, Homer Tasker. Cast: Doris Nolan, George Murphy, Hugh Herbert, Gregory Ratoff, Gertrude Niesen, Ella Logan, Henry Armetta, Ray Mayer, Mischa Auer, The Three Sailors, Gerald Oliver Smith, Peggy Ryan, Jack Smart, Claude Gillingwater, Ernest Cossart, Samuel S. Hinds, Richard Carle, The Four Squires, Original California Collegians.

**T**HE rest of *Top of the Town* does not live up to the contribution made to it by John Harkrider who designed the sets which give it outstanding pictorial beauty. Harkrider comes from the stage, but it has not taken him long to discover that photographic values are what count in screen architecture. His sets are among the most imposing ever shown on the screen, and they lend themselves admirably to the camera treatment accorded them by Joseph Valentine. The photography is of rich, warm quality, gradations from black to white being nicely shaded to obtain striking effects of great artistic merit. Harkrider and his associate, Jack Martin Smith, are to be credited with giving the production its chief box-office value.

A weakness of the picture is the over-crowding of the magnificent Harkrider sets. There are too many people

on the screen, so many the story has a hard time in pushing its way through the crowds. And the story itself has an unusual weakness. The most elaborate setting shows the Moonbeam Room, a great night club occupying the hundredth floor of a New York skyscraper owned by the family of Doris Nolan. She wants to elevate night club entertainment by giving it a highbrow touch and ridding it of the swing influence which George Murphy wants it to have. Boiled down, the story is one of Doris being wrong and George being right.

**T**O prove Doris wrong, the great throng at the opening night has to be dissatisfied with the entertainment offered it. It does become dissatisfied, and those it does not put to sleep begin to walk out and are stopped only by the breaking out of the associated swing artists led by Murphy. That is all right strictly as a story situation. Unfortunately, those who pay to see the picture have to sit through the entertainment which irritates the audience in the picture. And that would be all right if the irritation were expressed in a manner which made it entertaining to the point of serving as a counter-irritant to the irritation. But it is not. There is no entertainment in watching people yawn at tables or walk toward exits.

I do not wish to convey the idea that *Top of the Town* is not entertaining. It is. My complaint is that the manner of its presentation does not make the most of the talent included in the long cast, that individual numbers are not held together by an interesting story. But it has Peggy Ryan. Now ten years old, Peggy already is one of the greatest tap dancers in the world. That is my own estimate. As far as I know, this is her first appearance and the world has not hailed her yet. She alone is quite enough to repay you for seeing the picture. And there is some of George Murphy's beautiful dancing, also much of his pleasant personality. The Three Sailors are extraordinarily clever comedians. Henry Armetta is in it. And Hugh Herbert. The singing of Ella Logan and Gertrude Niesen would please more if their upper registers were more pleasant to listen to. Gregory Ratoff reads his lines in his usual manner, without shading and much too loudly.

## Warners Take Us to Prison

**SAN QUENTIN**, a First National picture. Directed by Lloyd Bacon; screen play by Peter Milne and Humphrey Cobb; story by Robert Tasker and John Bright; assistant director, Dick Mayberry; photography by Sid Hickox, A.S.C.; film editor, William Holmes; art director, Esdras Hartley; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; gowns by Howard Shoup. Cast: Pat O'Brien, Humphrey Bogart, Ann Sheridan, Barton MacLane, Joseph Sawyer, Veda Ann Borg, James Robbins, Joseph King, Gordon Oliver, Garry Owen, Marc Lawrence, Emmett Vogan, William Pawley, Al Hill, Max Wagner, George Lloyd, Ernie Adams.

**A** REMARKABLY impressive social document giving us a more intimate glimpse of prison routine than any other picture has succeeded in doing. A Warner Brothers camera obviously served a term in San Quentin of sufficient duration to come back with a series of impressions so vivid that those viewing the picture will feel they also served a term in the formidable penitentiary. Just how the general public will accept a piece of screen

entertainment so drab in theme and so authentically presented is a question the box-office will have to answer. But those who can derive entertainment from witnessing an exceedingly capable cinematic job will find *San Quentin* very much worthwhile. It is a stirring drama which will command close attention from beginning to end. It is so up-to-date it includes a sit-down strike, this time one of convicts who refuse to go to work when the prison whistle blows.

The story is a good one and the screen play is a closely knit series of incidents which build logically to a thrilling climax. Lloyd Bacon's direction makes the most of the story material. He makes his characters human and understandable, acquaints us with their points of view until we accept their actions as just what we might expect of them. That is the main thing a director has to do to make his picture entertaining. Bacon's handling of his mass shots is particularly creditable and his direction of dialogue is equally commendable. There is none of the shouting of lines which harm so many pictures and which only a short time ago harmed practically all of them.

**U**NDER such direction only completely satisfactory performances could result. Pat O'Brien is the center of interest as the leading character and holds the interest by giving us one of the most sincere of his long list of compelling characterizations. As the army officer called in to improve the morale of the convicts, he moves quietly through the picture, a soft-spoken, authoritative man who knows his objective and is resolute in attaining it. Opposite him, and the other half of the romance which lessens the drabness of the other elements of the story, is Ann Sheridan who impresses us with both beauty and brains. Humphrey Bogart again proves what an accomplished actor he is. His performance is one of the picture's main assets.

There are several others in the long list of speaking parts who deserve special mention, among them Barton MacLane, Joseph Sawyer, Veda Ann Borg and Joseph King. The photography of Sid Hickox is excellent, and Film Editor William Holmes handled with skill a production rather difficult to cut.

*San Quentin* will serve a useful social purpose in giving the public a more intelligent grasp of the problems of prison officials whose duty it is to make good citizens out of bad ones. It really is an educational picture, but it has a chase sequence that will raise your hair and remind you that it also is another motion picture with about as much thrill as you can hope for.

*Blanche Sewell*

M-G-M

## Reviews by Paul Jacobs

### Charlie Chases Another

CHARLIE CHAN AT THE OLYMPICS, Twentieth Century-Fox. Directed by H. Bruce Humberstone; associate producer, John Stone; screen play by Robert Ellis and Helen Logan; original story by Paul Burger; based on the character CHARLIE CHAN, created by Earl Derr Biggers; photography, Daniel B. Clark, A.S.C.; art direction, Albert Hogsett; associate, Chester Gore; assistant director, Jasper Blystone; film editor, Fred Allen; costumes, Herschel; sound, E. Clayton Ward and Harry M. Leonard; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Warner Oland, Katherine de Mille, Pauline Moore, Allan Lane, Keye Luke, C. Henry Gordon, John Eldredge, Layne Tom, Jr., Jonathan Hale, Morgan Wallace, Fredrik Voegding, Andrew Tombes, Howard Hickman.

**O**NE of the best of these nickle-in-the-slot packages that repeat themselves, this Charlie Chan mystery is good fun. Of course Warner Oland's powerful personality

dominates everything from the murder to the Olympics themselves. If Mr. Oland does not try his hand at something else pretty soon, he probably will wake up some day talking Chinese. No one can so completely imbue himself with a characterization without going slant-eyed from sheer habit. Oland is better than good. He is perfect.

Particular credit must go to Paul Burger for his really clever story. He brings Charlie right up the minute by fastening the plot threads to current history and to very modern science. With capable translation by Robert Ellis and Helen Logan and smooth editing by Fred Allen, *Charlie Chan at the Olympics* represents the best in class B office effort. Add to that the professional ease of director H. Bruce Humberstone and you get the idea.

**H**ERE is something else: the SPECTATOR long has argued the greater importance of a director over the name of an actor. Always Catherine de Mille has shown herself to be a trouper; but her abilities naturally fluctuate with the direction given her. In *Charlie Chan at the Olympics* she gives her best performance. A tribute to Mr. Humberstone and to the sensitivity of a finely attuned actress.

Keye Luke, on the other hand, presents a peculiar problem. His personality is so likable and his evident sincerity so captivating that no one can denounce his theatricism without feeling unhappy. I wish he would go back to his first love (exquisitely graceful painting) and leave me a remnant of my callous indifference. Pauline Moore is cute and convincingly athletic. And her boy friend, Allan Lane, makes the other half of an Olympic love team unbeatable.

Splendid support by such masters as C. Henry Gordon, John Eldredge, Jonathan Hale and Andrew Tombes lends the final finished touch. And Layne Tom, Jr., makes us proud of what American training can do for Young China.

**HOBART CAVANAUGH**

**ROBERT M. HAAS**

ART DIRECTOR

WARNER BROS.-1st NATIONAL

MANY HAPPY RETURNS  
TO THE SPECTATOR

**RALPH DAWSON**

WARNER BROS. 1st NATIONAL

CONGRATULATIONS  
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**EDWARD KILLY**

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**HARRY RUSKIN**

NOW WRITING FOR

M.-G.-M.

**HARRY SCHENCK**

General Manager

Hollywood Studios



## Mr. Moto Is Mighty

THINK FAST, MR. MOTO, 20th Century-Fox. Executive producer, Sol M. Wurtzel; director, Norman Foster; story, J. P. Marquand; screen play, Howard Ellis Smith and Norman Foster; photographer, Harry Jackson; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin; film editor, Alex Troffey. Cast: Peter Lorre, Virginia Field, Thomas Beck, Sig Rumann, Murray Kinnel, John Rogers, Lotus Long, George Cooper, J. Carrol Naish, Fredrik Vogeding.

**A** POWERFUL contract of life-patterns, *Think Fast, Mr. Moto* has everything it takes to make box-offices sit up and beg. Flashing from the sinister tempo of oriental life to the dignity and folly of occidental bluntness, this fast-paced sketch of a dynamic Japanese whose versatile brilliance spot-lights the action, is a "must see" picture. And Peter Lorre supplies the "must"; always commanding, Lorre is here at his arresting best.

A canny producer, Sol M. Wurtzel seemed to have sensed the potentialities of *Think Fast, Mr. Moto* because he has wisely given it every aid a competent technical staff can contrive. And his small, thorough, cast carries an invincible illusion. Virginia Field, Thomas Beck, Sig Rumann, Murray Kinnel, John Rogers, J. Carrol Naish and the others, each induce a vivid weaving of character-threads which tightly bind the plot to the action and the reality-illusion. It is a masterpiece throughout.

Naturally, special credit goes to Howard Ellis Smith and Norman Foster for their intelligent handling of J. P. Marquand's original. And Norman Foster has obviously found his niche. "Directed by Norman Foster" hereafter will be a synonym for excellence.

## Too Many Roads

FIFTY ROADS TO TOWN, Twentieth Century-Fox. Directed by Norman Taurog; associate producer, Raymond Griffith; screen play by George Marion, Jr. and William Conselman; based on the novel by Louis Frederick Nebel; music and lyrics, NEVER IN A MILLION YEARS, by Mack Gordon and Harry Revel; photography, Joseph H. August, A.S.C.; art direction, Rudolph Sternad; set

decorations by Thomas Little; assistant director, Ad Schaumer; film, editor, Hansen Fritch; costumes, Royer; sound, Bernard Freericks and Roger Heman; musical direction, David Buttolph. Cast: Don Ameche, Ann Sothorn, Slim Summerville, Jane Darwell, John Qualen, Douglas Fowley, Allan Lane, Alan Dinehart, Stepin Fetchit, Paul Hurst, Spencer Charters, De Witt Jennings, Bradley Page, Oscar Apfel, John Hamilton, Russell Hicks, Arthur Aylesworth and Jim Toney.

**D**ESPITE the compelling direction of Norman Taurog and the splendid work of the cast, *Fifty Roads to Town* needs considerable editing before it achieves the status its intrinsic merits deserve. For example, we spend the first quarter of an hour watching Don Ameche and Ann Sothorn roar up and down the scenery in deep-lunged roadsters. It is a commendable example of wheel control, but it does not particularly advance the story. Later, knowing that a rich and important heiress is cloistered with the hunted Mr. Ameche, a group of deputies

CESAR ROMERO

LEW LANDERS

R. K. O.

Congratulations  
to  
Hollywood Spectator  
WILLIS COOPER  
20th Century-Fox

WILLIAM RANKIN  
ELEANORE GRIFFIN

CLIFF SMITH  
UNIVERSAL

E. R. HICKSON  
Art Director  
TREM CARR, INC.  
New Universal

shred the hide-out to pieces with enough bullets to settle the Spanish war. And this—after warning each other that the innocent girl must not be hurt. Evidently the boys either remember that it really is all in fun and that they are shooting blanks or that the joy of shooting at a trapped murderer is worth the life of an honest and sweet girl.

There are other bits of quaint logic scattered throughout. But their deletion is easy, and Producer Zanuck has a potential hit in *Fifty Roads to Town*. Directed with a vigorous rhythm and inducing moments of poignant sweetness, this film is given the thoroughly competent production we have come to associate with Mr. Zanuck. No better job of acting could be asked for than Don Ameche's suave portrayal, Ann Sothern's deliciously feminine inconsistency and Slim Summervill's adroit stupidity.

**Betty Burbridge**

*Republic Studio*

**MACK WRIGHT**

DIRECTING FOR

REPUBLIC

**HELP THE  
MOTION PICTURE  
RELIEF FUND**

CONGRATULATIONS TO  
WELFORD BEATON  
and  
HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR  
**BUSBY BERKELEY**

Brief but vivid bits by John Qualen, Stepin Fetchit, Spencer Charters and De Witt Jennings are added props to an almost firm structure. Briefer still, but quite as well drawn, is the work of Jane Darwell, Douglas Fowley, Allan Lane, Paul Hurst, Bradley Page, Oscar Apfel and John Hamilton.

If, then, the mistakes made by scripters George Marion, Jr. and William Conselman are corrected, *Fifty Roads to Town* will be tops in entertainment. Even if it is released as it is, you won't be cheated.

### Worthy Mexican Production

**ALLA EN EL RANCHO GRANDE.** Distributed in the United States by Azteca Films, Los Angeles, Calif. Starring Tito Guizar. Original story by Luz Guzman de Arellano and Guz Aguila; script by Guz Aguila and Fernando de Fuentes; adaptation and musical supervision, Lorenzo Barcelata; photography, Gabriel Figueroa; sound, J. B. Kroger; director, Jose Fernandez; assistant director, Mario Lara; montage, Fernando de Fuentes; producer, Alfonso Sanchez Tello; synchronization, Jose Marino.

*Reviewed by Edward Le Veque*

**A**S I mentally review the Mexican picture, *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (Over at the Big Ranch), I find it studded with delightful moments which are a pleasure to recall. It is one of Mexico's westerns; a gorgeous western of big sombreros and shining spangles; product of a calid soil of white-washed haciendas, fiery eyed señoritas and impetuous caballeros who make love to the accompaniment of guitars. Yet, in spite of its romantic sweep, it stuck to reality, so much so, that it succeeded in capturing the soul of a people, a most elusive quality to film. Because it portrays a distinct class of people—the Mexican ranchers—as they truly are, and without distortion of characters or environments for dramatic effect, a most common thing among our Hollywood product, this film is a true visual document of Mexico's rural life.

No intelligent American should miss this production, especially after it has superimposed English titles, a matter which is now being arranged. Not only will he be surprised at the high quality of sound and camera technique that our artistic cousins from below the Rio Grande are able to display, but at the intelligence of direction and of story-telling that tops many of our costly productions; a remarkable feat, since this picture was made with pocket change, and, quoting a Mexican saying: "with the finger-nails," meaning lack of tools, but much ambition.

**A**NOTHER reason why Americans should view it, and school-boards should encourage their charges to see it, is

(Continued on Page Forty)

Congratulations  
to  
Welford Beaton  
**BARRY TRIVERS**  
New Universal

# In Defense of the Movies

By Frederick Stone

"**D**EFEND the movies, indeed! And against what?" you ask indignantly. As well you might, for who, you say, would attack them? In the past months you have seen a dozen excellent pictures. You have been carried away in space and time, you have been thrilled emotionally and stimulated mentally, you have laughed beyond endurance. Now and then you may even have come out of the theatre and wandered about in the street aimlessly, for a few moments, not quite knowing what you were doing, wanting to sit down somewhere at once to be quiet and alone: for you were filled with the same tremendous sensations which swell within you when you have read a great poem, or heard a splendid symphony, or seen an immortal drama on the stage.

To be sure, you have seen quite a few bad pictures as well, but you know that a glance at the reports of any one of the dependable reviewers would have saved you that, if you had wanted particularly to be saved. One great film made up for many bad ones, and if you insisted on seeing the latter you did so not out of habit, but rather because you were the victim of highly refined form of masochism. In any case you have seen a lot of very fine pictures, and the others are entirely irrelevant. You think the movies are great. Why, then, you ask again, an article in their defense?

**T**HE fact is, you poor deluded creature, that the movies are not Art. It is useless for you to protest that they are, because that is only what *you* think. You have been bewitched by "an eye teaser, a toy, a mechanism to puzzle, thrill and divert," and you are no longer capable of judging what is art and what is not. The quotation is from William Allen White's article, *Gum Chewing Relaxation*, in a compendium of complaints called *The Movies on Trial*. The movies, he says in effect, are bad because they are big business—yet the excellence of his apartments in New York indicates that the big business of real estate is somehow different.

Mr. White is only one of many critics to condemn the cinema in such certain terms. Gilbert Seldes, writing in Harper's Bazaar in 1935, said that in the past five years not a single picture of the highest order of importance had been produced in the United States. Seymour Stern, in an article entitled *The Bankruptcy of Cinema*

*as Art*, also to be found in *The Movies on Trial*, states the case fully, and it is well worth reading. His conclusions are aptly summed up in his title.

**E**UROPE is giving the world no pictures of any artistic value, he says, and Hollywood "has offered only the half truths, the superstitions, the vapid and sensual daydreams of the crowd . . . the best Hollywood products of our time are poor and contemptible things." As if this were not bad enough, Mr. Stern takes a deep breath and plunges into a remarkable generalization. "The Hol-

GILBERT EMERY

ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD

Warner Brothers

JAY MARCHAND

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

FINN ULBACH  
GENERAL PICTURES

PHILLIP CAHN  
FILM EDITOR  
UNIVERSAL STUDIO

lywood film industry," he says, "remains the foe of real art, the retarder of real cinematic progress—in short, the greatest single retroactive, anti-cultural influence in the world today." I trust that Adolf Hitler will not hear of this: his pride may be sensitive to that point.

To judge by their own terms and definitions, these critics would probably not feel differently about any of the films which have appeared since they wrote, so that a defense of the movies must still be in order these few months later. Inasmuch as the basic cost of producing films is so great, it follows that there would be no films at all unless they are supported by the public; any discussion of how "artistic" the cinema might be if it were not grounded, as they say, by commercial factors, is futile—because if the films did not have popular appeal there could be no films. Yet this is not peculiar to the business of the cinema. Any stage play which is too

artistic for the public either never reaches the stage or dies an early death on the boards.

**T**HE plays of Shakespeare are full of popular values; had they not appealed to the public at large and continued to do so down the years, his name today would be little more than an hour's encumbrance in a student's mind. If the cinema should suddenly attempt to meet in full the artistic demands of the more remote intellectuals, this brilliant new medium of expression would shortly become limited to the newsreel, the documentary film, and the amateur movie. Artistic or not, there would be nothing left to criticize. The drug which these aesthetic diagnosticians advocate would cure the disease and kill the patient.

Any discussion of art in the cinema must therefore be conducted in terms of what can be achieved within the commercial boundaries of the medium; speculations which do not follow this premise are merely pedantic. And what has been thus achieved? In 1936 Hollywood released approximately twenty-five films of high merit, of which a dozen or so were truly great and important. The comedies and the films of adventure were completely delightful and satisfying—other arts have, in their own way, given us nothing better. The more serious pictures, on the other hand, were based on themes of dignity and consequence, they utilized the distinctive potentialities of cinema to the fullest extent possible, and they moved their audience profoundly. 1937 has already brought us *The Good Earth*, and *Lost Horizon*, two of the finest works of cinema art ever achieved. Several of the foreign importations were equally noteworthy. In short, these outstanding films were independent artistic creations.

**W**HAT, more than this, have the other arts to offer? The detractors of the cinema point with disdain to the great mass of mediocre movies produced each year. They

SHERIDAN GIBNEY

CHARLES J. HUNT  
Associate Producer  
CONDOR PICTURES

HOMER G. TASKER  
SOUND DEPARTMENT  
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To Hollywood Spectator  
EDWARD MELCHER  
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OGDEN NASH  
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Congratulations to  
The Hollywood Spectator  
ROBERT McGOWAN

attempt to belittle the cinema by comparison with literature, music, and the drama, yet the fact is that these arts produce as much trash as does the cinema, and give to the world no greater proportion of worthy artistic achievement. In a normal theatrical season more than one hundred and fifty plays are produced on Broadway alone, yet after the ten best plays of any year have been chosen there is very little left over that is worth remembering—and the theatre is not handicapped by having to keep up with the ravenous demands of a world public. In the field of literature, hundreds of trivial books appear for every novel of any distinction which is published. And so on. No critic would think of condemning literature or the drama because it produces but a very small percentage of good works, yet this is the very charge so often directed against the cinema. Why this should be so is a question we must leave to the psychologists.

At the same time, conditions for creation in the other arts are ideal as compared with the obstacles which hamper artistic production in the cinema. Films are made under a multitude of adverse conditions from which the other arts are relatively free. Novels can be written and plays produced at complete leisure as compared with motion pictures, which are nearly always made under the implacable pressure of production schedules.

**T**HE cost of producing, distributing, and exploiting films is so great that they must please the world in general before they can make decent profits. In no other art do so many cooks meddle with the pot. The director, who should be the guiding mind from first to last, is hindered and restricted at every turn; not the least of his difficulties is the star system which compels him to fit the part to the actor rather than the actor to the part, so as to fulfill the preconceptions which have been advertised into the public mind.

Another handicap lies in the limited choice of available themes. Somewhere a militant minority is always

waiting, ready to cry out against any film which carries a valid social theme. For example, *The Plough and the Stars*, a magnificent work of film art, was recently banned in Japan because the revolt in Ireland as shown in the picture might remind the people of Japan's own late uprising; yet the social and political similarity between the two is absolutely nil. And censorship, of course, is the most serious of all the handicaps to artistic expression in the films. It is another price which the cinema must pay for the size of its public—but while it must be admitted that some form of censorship is necessary, it is deplorable that the extent of it should be so great, and the quality so bad.

No other art is crippled by censorship as is the cinema; and cinema censorship, incidentally, will not start freely on the road to reason until its feet are pulled out of the political mud. Therefore, in view of these and the many

GREETINGS FROM

*Jane Darwell*

LARRY WICKLAND

Republic Pictures

COMPLIMENTS OF

**AL SIEGEL**

PARAMOUNT

**CY MOCKRIDGE**

20th CENTURY-FOX

CONGRATULATIONS TO  
HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR  
ON ITS 11th BIRTHDAY

**RALPH OBERG**

Republic Pictures

GREETINGS TO  
WELFORD BEATON  
AND

HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR

**JEAN NEGULESCO**

WARNER BROS. FIRST NATIONAL

other factors which handicap the producers who would make pictures of artistic merit, it is remarkable that any have been made at all. That so many super films have been made is tribute to the artistic integrity of the talents which combined to create them.

The accusation is often heard that the films borrow too much from the stage, both in material and in technique. While many of our best films borrow from the stage, they now do so by reducing the play to its dramatic essentials and building up again in terms of cinema. This is completely legitimate adaptation, for an idea which is fundamentally dramatic can be made into either a good play or a good picture. *The Plough and the Stars* is a recent example.

**H**ERE the technique is purely that of the cinema. Wherever possible the story is told by the camera, and dialogue is used only when mood and meaning cannot be conveyed without it. The film achieves dynamic life through the conscious use of cinematic rhythms, and attains the quality of visual symphony. In its adaptation of the material from the original the film version avoids the wholesale death and decay of the protagonists, yet loses none of the dramatic force or vital import of the play. In fact, in my opinion the picture is a far more effective dramatic whole than the stage play. Several other instances in recent film history, among them *Win-*

*terset*, could be given in which the film has improved upon the play from which it was adapted.

Gradually the cinema is developing its own sources of dramatic material, and it will continue increasingly to do so as the handicaps and restrictions are removed. In the meantime most creative artists who have something of importance to say will go to the arts where there is greater freedom of expression, and the cinema will temporarily have to go on borrowing largely for its valid social and human themes. It is certain, however, that as the restrictions to free expression are removed from the cinema, more and more of the world's important thinkers and artists will turn to it as their medium; and through no other art can they reach so great an audience.

**A**S to the future of cinema art: With the maturity of talkies the industry has learned the proper functions of sound, dialogue, and music, and it will no doubt give color its logical place in the background. With color the realistic film will be all the more true to life, while films of fantasy will be even more effective than they are now, because fantasy is always more compelling in proportion to the authenticity of the frame in which it is set. The uses of three dimensional films will be identical. Whatever technological advances may be made, they will be turned to advantage in adding to the power of the film, for the industry has learned the proper function of cinema and will know how to use the new tools to best advantage.

Despite the chronic censure of some observers, the cinema has already taken its place among the great living arts. Furthermore, each successive picture of artistic merit will make it easier for others to follow, as exposure to fine pictures gradually raises the cultural demands of the general public. The average man slowly and in fact unconsciously begins to prefer pictures which utilize to fuller advantage the intrinsic qualities of the cinema, and the average film, in turn, can improve in proportion to the betterment of public taste.

This virtuous circle will continue to revolve until one day those pictures which most completely obey the artistic commandments of the medium will do the best business—and most of the handicaps to film expression will fall quietly away during the process. Then, at last, the cinema will take its predestined place as the most expressive and the most important art form in the world.

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ADELE BUFFINGTON  
"Michael O'Halloran"  
Screen Play  
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# Hollywood Spectator's Standing as an Aid

## Prefers It to All the Rest Put Together

I prefer your reviews to all the rest put together. Last week I used nearly a whole period of my Movie Appreciation class to laud Mr. Beaton's reviews, and to compare their worth and dependability with those found in other papers and magazines. The pupils have the privilege of taking the magazine to read during their study periods. We depend upon it largely for our decisions about what picture to see next, for the reviews usually precede the Rochester showings by just about a week.—*MARGARET HOLLEY CARSON, Madison High School, Rochester, New York.*

## Reviews from Standpoint of Definite Philosophy

It is a wonderful thing to have a magazine directed to moving pictures whose whole tone is dignified, sincere, and free from advertising and cheap publicity. Furthermore, the technical and artistic values of pictures as reviewed by you and your staff are not allowed to overbalance the social value. And yet, the criticisms are fair, broad-minded and appreciative of the qualities that you believe make for successful screen entertainment. I may not always agree with you, but I do more often than not, and more with you than with any other one reviewer. The reason for our unanimity of opinion is that you review from a standpoint of a definite philosophy. You know both the show-man's and the audience's point of view, and somehow you manage to reconcile both. These are the points that I pointed out to my club as I recommended that they read your publication regularly and try choosing their pictures according to the opinion they formed from your reviews. One young chap who has been very active in the club for some time, announced positively, "You will find it works." I am glad to have student endorsement; it's worth more than mine with the others, of course.—*SARAH McLEAN MULLEN, National Authority on the Study of Motion Picture Appreciation; Motion Picture Editor, Scholastic, The American High School Weekly, New York.*

## High School Seniors Have Respect for It

The SPECTATOR is one magazine which can be depended upon for utterly honest reviews of moving pictures. Santa Barbara High School seniors have learned that they will not find sycophantic criticism in it; hence, they respect its statements. It is a joy to find one magazine that is real news and genuine criticism, not thinly veiled advertising.—*E. LOUISE NOYES, Santa Barbara High School, Santa Barbara, California.*

## Almost a Necessity for Libraries and Schools

I consider the SPECTATOR almost a necessity for libraries, schools, public relations groups—all those working with and for the moving pictures.—*INA ROBERTS, Publicity Director, Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland, Ohio.*

## No Other Single Source So Useful As Spectator

As part of a two-year experiment in the General College, we have prepared a highly selected group of reading material on motion pictures for our course in Film and Theatre. This involved a complete inventory and first-hand appraisal of all extant literature including magazine articles for the last twenty years. We have found no other single source is so useful as the HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR. Mr. Beaton's writings are sincere, based on a realistic understanding of the fundamentals of motion pictures, and resist the arguments of bloodless esthetes, of producers too short sighted for the good of their business, and of reformers with no real feeling for the medium of the movies. Next year we intend to make the SPECTATOR a regular reading assignment in our course.—*PAUL R. WENDT, Visual Education Service, University of Minnesota.*

## Thought-Provoking, Stimulating, Worthwhile

Although I do not always agree with you in your reviews of motion pictures, I believe that the HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR is a stimulating and worthwhile publication from the standpoint of motion picture appreciation. It is thought-provoking and raises many important questions which need to be considered by anyone who attempts to understand the cinema.—*FREDERIC M. THRASHER, Associate Professor of Education, New York University, New York City, New York.*

## Reviews of Inestimable Value in Making Studies

Our English classes find the SPECTATOR of aid in the study of Motion Picture Appreciation. I subscribed for it in order that the head of our English Department might have it for use in connection with her classes in that subject. About three years ago we organized a course in motion picture appreciation using *Motion Pictures and Youth*, by Dale, as a text. In connection with it we also had copies of the SPECTATOR and have found it of inestimable value in making studies of plays reviewed in it.—*PERCIVAL S. BARNES, Superintendent, The Public Schools, East Hartford, Connecticut.*

The Only Paper Published in America Devoted Exclusively to the Study of Motion Pictures



# in the Study of Motion Picture Appreciation

## Frank and Unbiased in Expressing Its Opinions

It is my custom to suggest that the teachers of Motion Picture Appreciation in the New Jersey High Schools make constant use of the SPECTATOR. A few reasons: You are frank and unbiased in expressing your opinions and judgments. Your preview reports arrive days ahead of material available from any other source. With the SPECTATOR on her desk, the teacher is closer to the center of motion picture activity. The teacher who uses the SPECTATOR will develop a pleasant feeling of comfort and at-homeness with her work. She will begin to know "what it is all about."—WILLIAM F. BAUER, Director, East Orange High School, East Orange, New Jersey.

## Interesting, Discriminating, Authentic Critique

I am circulating the HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR through all the members of my department. Their reactions are highly favorable to your interesting and, I believe, discriminating and authentic critique of the movie industry.—ARTHUR J. TODD, College of Liberal Arts, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

## Point of View Consistent, Artistic Judgment Sound

With a consistent point of view, sound artistic judgment, and an intelligent sense of values, the SPECTATOR is a delightful and stimulating guide to any worker in the field of motion picture appreciation. I know of no other magazine half so helpful to the teacher.—MRS. JESSAMINE I. WEBSTER, Rutherford Senior High School, Rutherford, New Jersey.

## Most Reliable of All Publications They Know

Feeling that the study of Motion Picture Appreciation should be widely extended throughout this and other countries, I would bespeak the value of the publication, HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR. If Mr. Beaton's ideals can become universal all who are connected with the education of the youth of our land will owe him a deep debt of gratitude for his enterprising endeavors in this field. We recommend the SPECTATOR as giving the most reliable information concerning the screen of any publication which we know.—BESSIE N. LEONARD, The Clarke School for the Deaf, Northampton, Massachusetts.

## Can Be Recommended Even Before Reading

In this day of "blurbs" and unreliable advertising, it is indeed cause for great gratitude to be able to have at hand an absolutely dependable publication. The SPECTATOR'S intelligently written reviews are of the type that can always be recommended even before they are read. With the exception of *The Readers Digest*, the SPECTATOR is the only magazine I have ever read that I know will be excellent even before I begin to read a new issue. Perhaps this may express my opinion a little more definitely: I was asked to recommend a list of material for teachers of Motion Picture Appreciation. The list was published in a widely read teachers' magazine, and included in it was this: "No teacher of Movie Appreciation can afford to be without Welford Beaton's HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR. This is in a class all by itself, and is absolutely dependable. The price is five dollars per year, but it is worth ten!"—MRS. LORING F. CARSON, Madison High School, Rochester, New York.

## Best She Has Found As An Aid to Her Teaching

The clear cut, definite discussion of standards of judgment, the evaluation of photoplays by these standards, and the personal, friendly style of writing in the HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR, make it the best magazine I have found to aid me in teaching Motion Picture Appreciation.—MARY RUTH DONOVAN, Concannon High School, West Terre Haute, Indiana.

## Is Continually Quoting and Reading the Spectator

As a teacher of English, I find myself continually quoting and reading the articles and reviews in the SPECTATOR to all of my classes. In my opinion it is the only motion picture magazine that is of high literary value in content as well as in the manner in which it is expressed.—HELEN MAE STEPHENSON, Madison Public Schools, Madison, New Jersey.

## Absolutely Invaluable As An Aid to Study

I consider the HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR absolutely invaluable as an aid in the study of motion picture appreciation. Not only is its philosophy sound but it is presented in a manner which makes it entertaining as well as informative. The students look forward to each issue of the SPECTATOR and nearly stand in line for the current number.—HAROLD M. TURNEY, Chairman, Department of Drama, Los Angeles Junior College, Los Angeles, California.

vely to the Motion Picture as a Commercial Art Form

PHIL ROSEN



 LEON  
ERROL 

**JOHN B. ROGERS**  
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MUSICAL DIRECTOR  
JUST FINISHED  
"HIT PARADE"  
Current Productions:  
It Might Happen to You  
Michael O'Halloran  
The Army Girl  
FOR REPUBLIC PICTURES

# Taking the Cinematic Pulse

By Paul Jacobs

**R**ECENTLY in the SPECTATOR I delineated the physical form of the typical film in which the main character is faced with a problem from which he derives a specific purpose or goal toward which he struggles. To differentiate this type of story from another, it is called the *purpose* or *achievement* film. But there is a second possible treatment which offers far greater opportunities to the writer, director and actors; a form which is dependent for its sustenance upon the very fibers of the actor's soul. In it, our main character is faced with a crucial decision instead of having a goal to achieve. Although it comprises a large percentage of fine magazine stories it has been slighted in films. I cannot help but feel that if its unusual potentialities were realized, it would be used to vary the monotonously regular output of achievement films. Let's glance at it.

Suppose, by way of example, our main character is a young wife whose happy domesticity is interrupted by the sudden visit of her old-fashioned mother. Her husband then, should be modern so that friction is evident. Now, since this type of story almost invariably is concerned with conflicting codes of conduct, the character traits which determine the view-points of the individual actors must be delineated carefully in the beginning; so that the intricate motivations can flow logically from these characterizing traits.

**T**HUS we would be made aware (through the action) that the mother is a firm believer in "obey thy parents" and kindred axioms. Therefore, with the best intentions in the world, she tries to run the household, spoil the young couple's baby (or at least object to modern methods of rearing), and usurp the companionship which rightfully belongs to the young husband—all this is an evident expression of her previously expressed make-up or viewpoint, which in turn is a result of her own old-fashioned up-bringing. We have a picture of conflicting codes.

Let us come back to the girl. Her love for her mother is counter-balanced by her love for her husband. It

becomes evident that she must actually choose between remaining with her husband (and asking her mother to leave) or supporting her mother against her husband, and losing him. Leaving the girl torn between her loves and codes of conduct, let us pause a moment and pry more deeply into the psychology of this type of story.

It is far more subtle and difficult to approach than the story of *purpose* which, psychologically, is an objectification of wish-fulfillment; the *decision* treatment goes far deeper, demanding not only an implied wish-fulfillment motive, but a struggle between wish-fulfillment and the social consciousness. Let me make this clear by exemplification.

**I**F we had taken the same situation about the girl, her husband, and her mother, and had wanted a *purpose* story, we would have given our heroine no decision to make, no choices to choose from, but instead we would give her the problem of adjusting the two people she loves. She would have the purpose or goal of making her husband more understanding and her mother more tolerant. The underlying psychology of audience-interest is that we have either had such a problem ourselves, our friends have had it, or we have read or heard about it.

COURTLAND  
FITZSIMMONS  
Writing for  
Republic Pictures

**GEORGE B. SEITZ**

Directing

**THE THIRTEENTH CHAIR**

for

**METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER**



WALTER HUSTON



*Congratulations  
and  
Continued Success*

J. WALTER RUBEN

M. G. M.

And although usually such a predicament ends disastrously in real life, we have the desire to achieve a successful solution; we want the wish for a happy adjustment fulfilled. And since we go to films for release from the haphazard and often unfair twists of fate that come in actual life, we seek that fulfilled wish in films, where the things we desire come true.

But the *decision* picture goes further into the human machine, by making our heroine's problem more complex. She eventually is faced with an absolute set of alternatives. No mere matter of adjustment; she must finally choose. In either choice, she is faced with codes of conduct. She has been reared to "honor thy father and thy mother". She has been reared to "obey thy husband". Naturally, however, there is a preponderant feeling. Perhaps it is the Biblical axiom about the eternal preference of the son or daughter for his or her spouse. Let us say that the girl loves her husband more than she does her mother. She is faced then, with the decision between her wish to remain with her husband (wish-fulfillment motive in audience) and a code of ethics (social consciousness).

**A**ND always, when two vital and desirable alternatives are at stake, the person making the choice must lose either way. If our heroine decides to support her mother, she loses her personal desire. If she remains with her husband she flouts a tenet of conduct by thrusting out her mother and thus losing social and self respect. The optimistic note so vital to entertainment films is given by showing the audience that because of the character-traits of the heroine (traits previously made clear) the choice is made in conformity with her true inner self, and thus will make her much more happy than the other choice. *The Garden Of Allah* exemplifies this. I have not seen the new version as yet, but if it correctly follows its categorical filmic form, it will bring this point out to the complete understanding of the audience. In a novel one may write an unjustified ending, in a film the end must be either happy or just.

Now let us again return to our young wife. It is evident that the story movement will be a series of delicate counter-influences. She is swung from one choice to the other. These influences are so important that if one of them is not present (the husband or mother) he should be represented symbolically as present when the girl is in the grasp of conflicting influence. Let me illustrate.

**H**ER struggle is mental and emotional, but it is exemplified by her external actions and the actions of her mother and husband. Some gesture or incident thrusts her decision almost in favor of her mother, some pathetic touch, bringing up childhood memories, perhaps—or some unruly but natural action by her husband. At that moment, even though her husband may be at work or elsewhere (probably he had gone to his club to get away from his unpleasant home atmosphere) some symbolism, a photo which catches her eye and carries her swiftly back into the sweet moments of her honeymoon, or

a ring he has given her, a pipe she gave him, etc., swings her back to the old conflict of indecision.

And here we have another tremendously important point. In the *decision* film, many times the emotional struggle will be made up of memories. Thus it is necessary to flash back into the past with the camera and *not with dialogue* except such dialogue as is used in the actual flash-back itself. When this is done, pulling the past up into the living present through the consciousness of the actor who is thinking about this scene, we immediately establish a vibrant intimacy between the actor and the audience and between the past and the present. To illustrate, in *Champagne Waltz* the girl wishes to explain the significance of her father's historic old salon of music. An hour of solid graphic dialogue could not have given the audience as beautiful and forceful an understanding as the two or three minute flash-back which showed us this same room at the peak of its glory many years before, the dead past springing to life before us. We saw it through the consciousness of the girl.

**C**OMING back to our troubled heroine, we see that the dramatic elements are emphasized by making each scene in some manner reflect the actual clash of the opposed forces within her. It should also be evident that there are two possible approaches to this type of film. Either the central character, the wife in this case, is faced with a condition in which the audience has predetermined the right and justified course (for example, that the girl should cleave to her husband; in which case the mother would be portrayed in an unfavorable light), and the audience is kept in doubt by logical developments as to whether the heroine will choose correctly. Or the choice is between two desires each of which may seem to be justified. Here the mother and the husband will be given equally sympathetic treatment. In this type the ultimate choice is shown to be the right one, by making her choice a final revelation of the girl's inner self and of the true natures of her husband and of her mother.

A final point is that it is always effective to build the necessity for a choice against a dead-line of time. I realize that this completely impromptu plot I have used is inadequate and does not do justice to the magnificent possibilities of this method of story treatment. But if it points out even faintly the opportunities producers are missing, I have more than satisfied my purpose. The *decision* treatment, then, is deserving of more serious consideration by the industry.

JANE HINTON SMITH

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CARL FREUND

ALFRED SANTELL  
DIRECTED  
WINTERSET



NOW  
DIRECTING  
PARAMOUNT  
PRODUCTIONS

# Where Are Pictures Heading?

By the Editor

**T**ERRY RAMSAYE, editor of *Motion Picture Herald*, is stirred into amiable speculation by the mounting costs of motion picture production; deals with the subject pleasantly and with his usual literary charm, and dismissing the prospect that anything will be done about it, leaves it just where he found it, contenting himself with the concluding observation that even if the dozen individuals who control production in this country got together and agreed upon a maximum budget which all would keep within, at least three of them would endeavor to steal a march on the others and break the agreement by phone before they got back to their offices.

In dealing with this subject, Terry is just eleven years to the day behind the *SPECTATOR*. Its first issue, whose birth we are celebrating today, gave producers some sage advice under the heading, "It's the Average Picture Which Needs Uplifting." "As it appears to us," I wrote then, "the problem of the individual producer is so to improve the entertainment quality of his pictures, without adding too much expense for his market to bear, that the market will be extended by his pictures finding favor in bigger houses than those for which they originally were made. Remove from the cheapest five-reeler its obvious evidence of cheapness and haste in production, and he will find that with no increase in cost he will

have on hand a neat little picture which will find its way into the higher-priced houses, thus extending his market." For "average picture" and "five-reeler," read "Class B," and the argument has bearing on today's situation.

**J**UMPING a decade to the *SPECTATOR*'s tenth birthday, we find a more extended discussion of rising production costs. As during the past year the *SPECTATOR*'s army of readers has tripled, we hope one old reader will permit us to reproduce for two new ones the remarks we made one year ago. Under the heading, "Where Are Pictures Heading?" this is what we had to say:

Metro spends upward of two million dollars in making its *Ziegfeld* spectacle. It is the most gorgeous production ever brought to the screen. Over in England Alex Korda makes *Things to Come*, the first British picture to cost over one million dollars. For technical wizardry it is said to surpass anything done in a Hollywood studio. Warners have given us *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a great achievement. From the same studio came the screen's finest biography, *Pasteur*, and perhaps the best photographed play, *Petrified Forest*. Metro's *Mutiny on the Bounty*, Dave Selznick's production of *Tale of Two Cities*, Warners' *Captain Blood*, and other big things on

## HENRY KING

Directed

**Seventh Heaven**

**A 20th Century-Fox**

**Production**

## Frank McDonald

Directing

for

**Warner Bros.-1st National**



the way prompt Red Kann to remark in *Motion Picture Daily*, "One of the better manufacturers of celluloid ironically talks about anything costing less than \$1,000,000 as a trailer."

All of which suggests the question: Where is the film industry heading? It has adopted the policy of making pictures out of money instead of out of human emotions. It has trained its audience to look for a million dollars on the screen of every picture house, and the only way it can hold its audience is to keep on spending more money as long as it is making the kind of pictures it is making now.

**A**S a matter of fact, though, producers have forgotten their audience and are conducting a battle of millions of dollars among themselves. They are trying to outdo one another, each is trying to top the other fellow's biggest production. But has the top not been attained already? Can we expect a more elaborate spectacle than *Ziegfeld*? A greater phantasy than *Dream*? A more impressive technical feat than the Korda picture? A grander sea epic than *Bounty*?

More millions of dollars might accomplish such things, but where are the millions to come from? "One segment of substantial Hollywood opinion," writes Kann, "thinks it sees the answer in a general hike in admissions." But today's pictures are not supporting today's admission prices. One feature filled film theatres yesterday; two features fail to fill them today. Here are some of the specimen double bills: *Show Them No Mercy*, *Metropolitan*; *Magnificent Obsession* (a \$1,000,000 production), *You May Be Next*; *Story of Louis Pasteur*, *Don't Get Personal*; *It Had to Happen*, *Tough Guy*; *The Lady Consents*; *Three Live Ghosts*; *Another Face*; *Red Salute*.

And such fare is not enough to draw audiences. Writes Chester B. Bahn, cinema critic of the Syracuse, N. Y., *Herald*: "The cinema, both as an art and a business, seems to be fast approaching a crossroads. Artistically, it is nearing the day when it must decide whether it shall continue the present 'mass production' course, with its attendant evils, or whether it shall abruptly about face and drastically restrict its product to pictures which can stand unsupported by 'second features,' give-aways, bank nights and kindred devices. Commercially, it cannot much longer ignore the fact that its competitive practices, especially in the field of exhibition, are ruinous, that showmanship today is largely a matter of 'promoting,' and that instead of selling films, it is merchandising crockery, plated ware, screen and a dozen other box-office stimuli."

**A**ND from across the Atlantic come indications that screen commentators over there are wondering about the future of pictures. Herbert Thompson, the discerning editor of *Film Weekly* (London), concludes an article on the Korda epic with: "I should admire him still more if he would now descend from the Olympian heights and clinch his film producing genius by making a simple, down-to-earth emotional drama of real human beings, preferably against an everyday English background."

Editor Thompson's advice to Korda is my advice to Hollywood producers. As they have gone as far as they can from the first principles of screen entertainment, they

HAPPY  
BIRTHDAY  
TO  
THE  
SPECTATOR

UNA MERKEL

DUDLEY NICHOLS

now adapting

“HURRICANE”

by NORDHOFF & HALL

for

SAMUEL GOLDWYN

JOHN FORD directing

# JOE MAY

## DIRECTOR

# One Hour of Romance

## For Warner Brothers-1st National

should return to them, and instead of trying to stupify audiences with the magnitude of their productions they should strive to entertain them with the power of the emotional appeal of more simple pictures. It is not the million dollars spent on it which makes a picture satisfy an audience. It derives its box-office value from its emotion-producing content, an element wholly unrelated to money.

To go back to Critic Bahn. In his faraway listening post he has caught the sound of a Hollywood plaint. "That there is a direct relationship between the double feature evil and the 'cheap' production policy observed by the studios, is fairly obvious," he writes. "That pictures budgeted at from \$100,000 to \$200,000 cannot have the same care as those costing five times as much is likewise. And one does not need to be a Daniel or a Solomon to comprehend that a \$200,000 picture cannot successfully compete with a million dollar 'epic' or even one costing half as much."

**T**HE \$100,000 picture fails to entertain its audience sufficiently to need no mate on the program with it, not because it "cannot have the same care as those costing five times as much," but because it does not have the same care. Double features, bank nights, general merchandizing, stage shows, were made necessary by the fact that studio attention gradually drew away from the many cheaper pictures and centered itself on the few whose costs have mounted until the million-dollar picture which startled us yesterday makes us yawn today.

The film industry is feeling sorry for itself, but it is suffering no ill for which it, itself, is not responsible. It never has tried to understand its medium. It is not aware that it was the simplicity of its expression which made the motion picture the greatest entertainment force the world has ever known, its power to appeal in the simplest terms to the emotions of mankind, its ability to express itself clearly in the elemental language of pictorial symbols. Made possible only by modern technical and mechanical discoveries, its pure form still remains the most primitive method of telling a story. The earliest known records of man's mental product are chiseled pictures on ancient cliffs, immovable pictures which tell stories of their day. In telling its stories, the screen merely makes its pictures move.

**H**OLLYWOOD has at its command a definite art medium and is as ignorant of its fundamentals as it is of the language of some remote African tribe. It grew great on the receipts from one business, and then, when given the sound camera, went into an entirely new business. It offers the public everything except its most marketable commodity, pure cinema. Photographed plays, overwhelming productions, big names make up its fare, and it seriously is considering tarnishing the purity of its art with smears of color.

Although it controls the only market for talent, it bids up prices and pays hundreds of thousands yearly to each of a group of people who could not sell their services elsewhere if Hollywood refused to pay so much for them. The market prices of talent have been created by the film



**I**n Appreciation  
of the  
Splendid Work  
by ...

## THE RELIEF GUILD

—A Friend





industry itself by the manner of its exploitation, and it is groaning under the burden of it. It refuses to consider an original story it could buy for a farthing and pays a pound for a play with less picture possibilities.

The greatest folly the industry ever committed was to put on airs and take itself out of the twenty-five cent entertainment class. If that were all anyone were asked to pay to see any picture, pictures of necessity would be made more sanely and both exhibitors and producers would be more prosperous.

**B**UT things that have been and things that are, are not matters of first importance now. The thing that counts is, what is going to happen? How can the industry change its course? It cannot pursue its present practice of piling cost on cost, and it cannot pass its extravagances on to its customers, for its salesmen, the exhibitors, have to give things away to tempt the public to buy its product at the present prices. To see a picture I wished to review I went to a theatre and won an electric coffee percolator, and a very good one, too, but I envied the man behind me who won a washing machine.

A considerable percentage of the industry's revenue is derived from people who do not go to theatres to view the industry's expensively made pictures. The chances of winning large sums of money or valuable objects of trade are offered as bribes to tempt patronage. It is a sorry state of affairs.

Time was when simply made pictures maintained all branches of the film industry at an even level of prosperity. It was not the manner in which they were made, however, which gave them their box-office value. What, then, was responsible for the film industry's prosperity in the first place? Is it possible to restore that prosperity?

It seems reasonable to assume that the kind of product which created the prosperity would be able to recreate it. It cannot be argued that a form of entertainment so sound fundamentally that it wrote the most spectacular page in the history of industrial development, could become in less than ten years a commercial commodity which the public no longer would buy.

**T**HE motion pictures which built the industry had but one handicap: they were unable to express themselves in sound when sound would have added to their entertainment value or expedited the pace of the stories they told. Superimposed titles were used on screens to acquaint the audience with the drift of silent dialogue. It would have been better if it had been possible to make audible the words the titles contained. Continuous musical accompaniments were a necessary part of screen entertainment. It could not be supplied at the source and the showing of the pictures often was harmed by the manner of its application at the outlet. It would have been well if producers had been able to make appropriate scores a part of their product to assure uniform showing during the entire life of a film.

It was a form of entertainment which appealed directly to the imagination, which presented nothing but unrealities which audiences had to imagine were real, which evoked purely emotional response. It was unique in that

**PAT O'BRIEN**

— AGAIN  
AND  
AGAIN

**JOSEPH  
H.  
NADEL**

**Production Manager  
Major Pictures  
Corporation  
Releasing Through  
Paramount  
Pictures Corp.**

# MARTIN MOONEY

RKO

**Best Wishes**

from

**Fred Jackman**

while it was basically intellectual entertainment, really animated visual literature, the cooperation of the intellect was not necessary to its enjoyment. We just sat back and viewed it, interpreted the fleeting pictures in such terms as pleased our imaginations most, had mental rest and a thoroughly good time.

In those days it did not matter what picture we saw. We used them merely as material out of which our imaginations manufactured entertainment to please our individual fancies. We did not shop for pictures. We went so many nights a week, no matter what was showing. That kept the film industry's prosperity steady.

**T**HEN came sound. It gave the industry the opportunity to improve the quality of its product by making audible the spoken titles and providing synchronized scores at the source, an opportunity to make greater the already great entertainment which had made Hollywood a thriving community by its command of a worldwide market.

But Hollywood producers promptly went out of the business that made them prosperous and headed up a false trail which they have been following ever since. They shattered the restful quiet of picture houses by talking their stories instead of photographing them. They dismissed imagination and made their product purely intellectual. They did not credit us with knowing when we saw steam issuing from a whistle there must be an accompanying noise. They shattered our nerves with the noise itself and with every other noise they could pick up anywhere. *They put into pictures everything whose absence from they had given the screen its worldwide popularity.* They destroyed the foreign market.

The novelty of sound ran picture attendance up to 120,000,000 paid admissions weekly in this country alone. When the novelty wore off attendance dropped to 70,000,000 weekly. To stimulate it Hollywood went dirty, produced pictures which were a disgrace to it and an insult to the public. Then the League of Decency saved the film industry's life by forcing it against its will to be decent. It still is chafing under the restraint of the enforced respectability which checked the downward curve of its box-office receipts.

I am not anticipating a calamity. The art of the screen has inherent strength to assert itself no matter what degree of punishment is accorded it. But I would like to see the picture industry come to its senses, return to its real business, cease thinking it can make screen entertainment out of dollars only, restore in the public the habit of going to pictures and put an end to its shopping for them.

It would be easy to do all this. It can be done by allowing the screen to talk its own language, by permitting the camera to resume its position as the story-telling medium and using the sound device as an incidental aid. Hollywood will have to come to it. Money cannot continue to entertain audiences. But motion pictures always will, dramas and comedies which give us more to look at and less to listen to. That is the kind of entertainment that built the industry and it is the only kind that will support it permanently.

# Writer Is a Simple Soul

By James Brant

**T**HERE are born into this world from time to time infants with a native and inherent mind above, beyond and deeper by far than that of the millions coming into being in the same generation. They grow into youths and maidens and if, by chance, they are not swamped and engulfed by the enervating desires and the devastating lusts that infest this human life and enter into and surround all environments, they seek a field of endeavor by choice, by accident, by influence or, in a rarity, by the urging command of a still, small voice that comes unbidden from a sphere unknown but comes with a force that will not be denied.

By study, reflection, observation, self-denial and the hardest kind of work, they prepare themselves to mold their abstract ideas into concrete forms for the good and the welfare of humanity. Because, forsooth, they have devoted their whole time and effort to accomplish a breadth of mind and a depth of thought capable of discerning the hidden verities and building them into useful practice, they have neglected to acquire the business sense for getting money and keeping it, and so they are unmercifully robbed, cheated and trimmed out of their just financial dues.

**O**F those so born perhaps the writer is the simplest sucker of them all. A writer, properly defined, is far removed from the common run of those who are expert in the use of the typed and printed sign-language. The run of mine of those who use the typed and printed signs of language for soundless talk, as a means to gain a livelihood, get by, some of them, with a fair sort of living and some with a very good living, but their contribution to the enlightenment of man and for a finer state of society and government, is mostly and generally nil.

The writer, seeking truth and its establishment in all the walks of daily life, just about starves to death, unless, by taking due thought unto himself, he also cultivates a smart business sense and ability. Then, naturally, with a reasoning, thinking mind, coupled with an acquisitive money sense, he gets, makes, obtains or acquires a sufficiency of income by this, that or any method, to satisfy his needs.

The greed of gold and the lust for power dull the wit of any man for the nobler attributes of life, and retards, for that very reason, the forward and upward progress of humanity. Because of that type of mind in power there

E. A. DUPONT  
UNDER CONTRACT  
TO PARAMOUNT

All Good Wishes

GENE MARKEY

**Henry Blanke**  
Associate Producer  
**Warner Brothers**

**IN PRODUCTION**

**One Hour of  
Romance**

and

**The Story of  
Emile Zola**



**DALTON  
TRUMBO**

Under Contract to  
**Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer**

Management: Small Landau



**NATE WATT**

Directing

**North of the Rio Grande**

For

**HARRY SHERMAN PRODUCTIONS**

Paramount Release

is a consequent subjugation of those who are qualified to understand and establish useful and practical ideas and ideals for the betterment of society and government.

**S**O the writer, simple soul that he is, arrives at that stage in the deepening and broadening of his thought and character where he has created and brought into being a brilliant idea concretely expressed with the silent signs of language arranged in rhythmic form and sequence. Having need of some of the medium of exchange and barter with which to purchase certain of those necessities required by humankind to exist decently, he offers his work for sale. Presently, it is in the hands of one of those who act as arbiters, referees and censors of what the godforsaken public should have in the way of food for thought and the building of the mind.

Said a very great editor to a very great publisher:

"Sire, behold this manuscript. 'Tis strange and most peculiar in its substance though in form 'tis pleasing."

Said a very great publisher to a very great editor:

"Subaltern, what is it that this writer doth essay?"

"Sire, it is a story of a subject that to me is foreign."

"Subaltern, it, indeed, must then be strange and scarcely to be countenanced. But, pray, what doth the story tell?"

"Sire, it mostly tells of truth."

"Of truth, subaltern! What, in God's own name is that?"

"Verily, Sire, I do not know."

"Forsooth, subaltern, why tarry in its handling? Re-

**J. Carroll Naish**

**Warner Baxter**

**George Raft**



# EDWARD LUDWIG

Directed

## "HER HUSBAND LIES"

A B. P. Schulberg Production

### HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR

"Ludwig's direction keeps the story intact, causes it to be a tightly knit succession of believable scenes building to a dramatic ending. . . . The performances in 'Her Husband Lies' also fit neatly into the pattern, and under wise direction have attained the quality that always makes screen performances perfect—the quality of naturalness which never suggests the actor."

### HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

"Strikingly fine direction gives this remake of 'Street of Chance' a top position."

### DAILY VARIETY

"Direction of Edward Ludwig is an especially creditable piece of work. He has motivated his characters with rare skill and given the entire film a dramatic tensiety . . ."



turn it with a gentle note in colors quite appropriate."

**P**ERHAPS the budding writer, with a tendency towards dramatic presentation, calls on one of those who have assumed, by virtue of control, the dictation and direction of the policy of public entertainment, enlightenment and education by and through the medium of the silent language of successive photography, commonly termed the motion picture. The simple-minded chump had no business tackling one of the lions of Daniel in his den because as a writer he was a damned poor salesman. But there he was in the presence of the glorified mighty.

"Mogul, here is a play to soften sorrow, fill the dropping, troubled heart with hope and lift the soul to higher state."

"Nonentity, just what by gracious Jacob and sweet Rachel do you talk about?"

"Your Excellency, most honored Mogul, it is a drama with a heart appeal that cheers the soul with thought uplifting."

"Underling, what is its subject? A word will tell me all I need to know. Be brief."

"Most noble Excellency, princely Sir, it is a play portraying truth."

"Hireling, are there in it any cannons, earthquakes, thunder, cyclones, rats, snakes or skunks?"

"Honored Mogul, it is empty of such things."

"Slave, are there in it murders, divorces, dance spec-

### SANTA MARIA INN

SANTA MARIA, CALIFORNIA  
Frank J. McCoy, Manager

*On the  
Coast Highway  
halfway between  
San Francisco  
and Los Angeles*

◆ "There is a restfulness about the Inn, an unobtrusive beauty that makes you feel comfortable and satisfied with yourself. But it is when you visit the dining-room for the first time that the Inn gets you. You think you've made a mistake and wandered into a flower show. The flowers are a background for the more solid business of appeasing material appetites. They attract customers, but the quality of the food holds them. Unesthetic travelers eat the food with no conscious appreciation of the beauty that surrounds them, yet it has a subconscious appeal that brings them back to the Inn and makes the food taste better and the beds feel softer."

WELFORD BEATON  
in  
THE SPECTATOR

tacles and torch songs?"

"Sir, it has none of that."

"Pup, be gone, I would not like it and our patrons' taste is mine."

"Excellency, most mighty and most glorified Mogul, dost thou know what thou canst do? Thou canst go to the devil."

**T**HE world progresses slowly. The worshipers of gold, with greed their pulsing motive, forswear the nobler virtues and take no thought of the life beyond. The lusts of power with dominance of race and state their mastering, inordinate ambition, forget the principle of right and are blind to the even-handed justice that lives through all eternity and weighs exact reward and penalty.

The soul-inspired, in all the arts and sciences, are hampered, hindered and often hobbled in their efforts to establish new ideas for betterment by the dominance of lust and greed in human activities.

There is, at this time, no system or method, way or means, for the dissemination and inculcation of fine and progressive thought for the betterment of society and government that has so much of worth as the motion picture, or that has such great potential force for the accomplishment of good.

The one and the only one who can lay the foundation for such accomplishment is the writer who is capable of ideal discernment, has practical sense and is qualified to shape his ideas into pleasing form and sequence.

## BEST WISHES

From

**ROBERT WARWICK**

**Congratulations**  
**CLARENCE MUSE**

**A. M. BOTSFORD**

PRODUCER

UNDER CONTRACT TO

PARAMOUNT

**BRYAN  
FOY**

Associate  
Producer

WARNER BROS.-  
FIRST NATIONAL

*Kathleen*

*and*

*Gene*

*Lockhart*

*Wishing The Spectator  
Eleven More Years of  
Continued Success*



LARRY CRABBE

## REVIEWS

(Continued from Page Eighteen)

because, since the characters are so humanly portrayed to the point that we find ourselves subconsciously loving them, it will do much to dissipate that subconscious distrust and hatred we bear towards our neighbors to the south; hatred that has been engendered by biased literature and our early movie westerns, in which nearly all the sneaking cowards, horse thieves and lusty murderers, were either our much abused real Americans, the Indians, or shifty-eyed Mexicans in comic opera, big sombreros and butcher knives.

Of course, this production is not exactly a cinematic achievement in the sense that the camera was the dominating factor in telling the story; some scenes were practically static, advancing the story by means of dialogue; but this sin is committed by nearly all of our Hollywood productions, and our Mexican neighbors merely aped some of these faults. This much must be said for it—its ten reels are packed with lively entertainment, something you cannot always say for some of our half-million-dollar productions.

The highlight of this picture focuses upon a novel twist; a musical clash between two rivals for the same girl. It consists of a repartee of impromptu observations sung to the tune of guitars, the observations soon becoming as personal as dagger thrusts. A memorable scene, expertly built to a terrific tension.

Arthur Voegtlin, who produced many of the spectacular shows at the New York Hippodrome, is now in Hollywood to assist Universal on their big *Hippodrome* picture.

## Readers Write

### Mussolini and Pictures

*An interesting letter comes from Silvano Balboni, well known in Hollywood and now in Rome where he is on the staff of the Director-General of Cinematography. He writes:*

I was surprised indeed to find a reference to a previous letter of mine in your SPECTATOR of January 30th, so cleverly incorporated in your excellent review of *Carnival in Flanders*. I must add that I was pleasantly surprised because you hit the well known nail on the head when you wrote what you did about Mussolini's attitude toward pictures. As you know, there are no well organized facilities nor clear concept as to continuity of production in Continental Europe. A man gets a notion that he can scare up some money together: he makes a picture. With this system he is bound to turn out inferior product at a high cost because he has to improvise, from time to time, an always new producing organization for every film he may make.

Now, both in France and Germany and even in England, where film production has received such a terrific wallop, they are realizing that a certain picture can be made at amazingly low cost if it can be produced in collaboration with a producer of another country. The result is that the new studios, equipment up to date, low costs, climatic conditions, general official encouragement, etc., continue to make Italy the focal point of all such international productions.

Here is an example of what I mean: A certain picture may cost in England 50,000 pounds to produce. It will have to be



exceptionally good to retrieve the money invested, plus a little interest, from the British market alone. All these countries have to rely almost exclusively on their home market because they have no foreign sales organization, and because they have no continuous and standardized product.

On the other hand, if the picture is made in Italy, both in English and Italian, it will probably cost around 60,000 pounds, which means that the British producer has spent only 30,000 pounds because the other half has been contributed by the associated Italian producers. Both producers will thus be able to make money out of their respective home markets. Anything to be had from foreign countries is usually split fifty-fifty.

The French producer is faced by the same necessity, aggravated by the fact that production in France, due to continuous strikes, requests for higher wages and generally desultory political conditions, has become a greater gamble than ever. The German producer, on the other hand, participates in Italian collaboration chiefly because production made in Italy, besides the already noted economic factor, will absorb that much of lightness and freshness peculiar to Italian concept of life as contrasted with the monotonous heaviness of Teutonic mannerism which is illy digested by the mass of the German public that got used to the general refreshing qualities of American pictures during the last decade. By all these various considerations you will see that Italy is really destined to a better motion picture future than it has been her lot since the World War. Of course it will never touch the American industry but, by and by, it may develop into something that might affect, to a degree, American sales in Europe. This is the trend as I see it from my desk.

### Makes Some Protests

Dear Mr. Beaton:

Why not abolish screen credits? Who reads them anyway? Why not a main title five seconds in length telling us the name of the picture? However, if we must have screen credits, why should we be deceived?

You saw *Maytime*. So did I. Where did Rida Johnson Young enter in the picture? I saw her *Maytime* in New York twenty years ago. I also heard a good bit of music by Romberg twenty years ago.

The picture was grand entertainment. Too grand to be convincing. It had music by Tschaikowsky, Meyerbeer, Delibes and others. But the whole thing must have been rather a crushing blow to poor Romberg, no matter how much MGM paid him for saying *Music by Romberg* in the main title.

They did "adapt" his song, *Will You Remember?* They changed the harmonies in an attempt to be "modern." To me it was all rather naive.

You were not deceived. Neither was I. But how about the dear old lady who told me that I must see *Maytime*? She said, "Romberg has written a lot of beautiful music for the picture; I don't think it can be the same music I heard in the musical play, but perhaps I am getting old and my memory is failing, as the story seemed so different this time and it surely was the same."

Some day I expect to see a main title announcing *Boy Meets Girl*, following which I shall be entertained with the amusing antics of Mickey Mouse.—*Wet Blanket Thrower, Hollywood.*

### Seems to Fancy Marie

Dear Mr. Beaton:

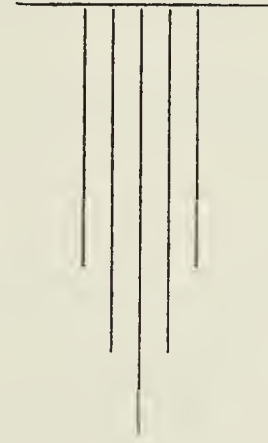
Apropos to the fact that you have most magnanimously reserved the last page of the SPECTATOR for letters and comments from your readers, may I digress from the usual fan comment at this time about your being a swell editor and having a swell magazine and get something off my chest!

There have been remarks and always will be anent the merits and demerits of casts and pictures after they have been released upon the unsuspecting(?) public, and though the validity of this letter's worth will be dubious inasmuch as my judgment and sense of values come not from the august seat of a casting director or producer, I do not want to think of you

# OTTO BROWER

Directing For

20th CENTURY-FOX



ERNEST  
COSSART

CONGRATULATIONS  
TO THE  
HOLLYWOOD  
SPECTATOR

# EARL BALDWIN

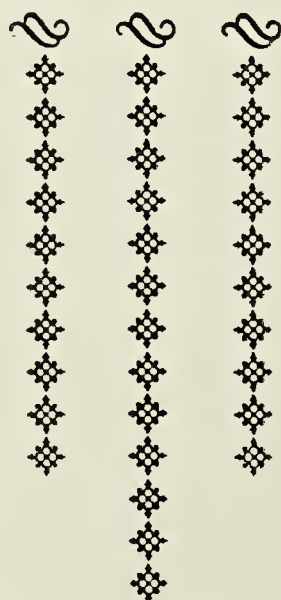
Associate Producer

Warners - First National

Current Production

## Ever Since Eve

Starring  
Marion Davies



in a deep brown study nervously scratching your chin or brow as to whether publishing this letter may or may not be the thing to do. You, my dear Mr. Beaton, are herewith absolutely absolved from any responsibility the letter might entail should any one make it his business to wag it over your head.

*Boy Meets Girl* is—to avoid argument let it be granted—an amusing story of the industry. I saw it in New York a year ago and again when it was here at the Biltmore, and the mirth-provoking incident of the plot is that all action evolves about and around a girl—an unbelievable girl. Did you see the play? Has there ever been anyone so delightfully refreshing? I hope you agree with me for then you will understand why I say Marie Wilson is the only actress in Hollywood who can successfully interpret this role.

It is with the anticipation of seeing this play reach the screen with the same amount of sincerity and conviction as the stage gave it that I am writing this open letter. I implore Warner Brothers not to let this “natural” for Marie Wilson be “hashed” by wrong casting.—G. H., *Hollywood*.

### A Picture He Likes

Dear Mr. Beaton:

This letter was stirred into being by a one-paragraph quote from your review of *Song of China*. I know I shall go out of my way to see this picture, for I respect your opinion of a film more than that of any critic I have yet found.

What I want to discuss is *Ecstasy*, a Czechoslovakian film. No doubt you have seen it long ago—most pictures come last to Chicago—but in the event that you have not, by all means do. I think it would interest you enough to repay at least a fifty-mile drive, maybe sixty.

*Ecstasy* is a moving picture in the true sense of the word. The tempo is slow, the characterization intimate, and the presentation of the story is above all, intensive. They didn't take too big a bite of story; the plot is simple as a poem. And the thing which will delight your heart as it delighted mine is the dialogue. I don't think there are more than thirty or forty words in the whole picture, perhaps even less; and they are used with wonderful power and discretion.

Then there is montage. Some of the devices may seem a little too clever, as if they were included merely because they were good ideas, but not the majority of them. Every scene, every action, every mood of the characters is brought home in a way in which it could never have been brought home in words. To a large extent these devices are symbolic. I detest the symbolism that is used in some of the left-wing experimental pictures, where the symbols are often abstract and not inherent in the play. In *Ecstasy* the symbolic actions and objects are part of the picture, part of the studio props, you might say. Besides its artistic merit, this insures a flow of continuity even for the slow-witted person who doesn't catch the symbolism, and not a blank, enigmatic interlude. Most striking was a close-up of the wife's hand, taking her wedding ring off with thumb and middle finger, stretching the ring finger and putting it back on again.

Now, I haven't seen very many good pictures. Is *Ecstasy* really an innovation, or is it merely one of many progressive pictures that Europe is now contributing? Of course it is slashed to pieces by censors so that the ending is not very understandable, but even this lack of unity doesn't spoil my delight in the film.

I believe it will mark the arrival of the moving picture as an art, when producers stop making photoplays out of novels, out of stage plays, out of operas and operettas, and start making them out of scenarios. But that, I guess, is only the fate of the young brother among the arts, bullied and dominated by the older members of his family.

Here in Chicago people interested in films are so few that they all know each other personally. Of course, I don't include the theatre managers and film distributors here; they are not interested in films. And after the rather limited and outdated resources of the town's libraries are absorbed, the only medium of communication left is word of mouth. Maybe it's the same way in Hollywood; I wouldn't be surprised.—Rudolf Bretz, *Chicago, Illinois*.



Best Wishes

From

Joan and

Dick Powell



JEANETTE

MACDONALD



WALDEMAR

YOUNG

*Screen Playwright*



Recent Release

THE PLAINSMAN

Management  
Charles K. Feldman

**EDWARD H. GRIFFITH**

**Completed**

**"Cafe Metropole"**

**Beginning**

**"Second Honeymoon"**



**GEORGE  
BRICKER**

**Writing for  
Warner  
Brothers**

**WESLEY  
RUGGLES**

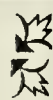
**Producing and  
Directing  
for  
PARAMOUNT**



**Valiant Is the Word  
for Carrie**

**The Bride Comes Home**

**In Production  
I Met Him in Paris**



**HELP  
THE  
MOTION  
PICTURE  
RELIEF  
FUND**



**BERNARD  
HYMAN**

**Producing for  
METRO-GOLDWYN-  
MAYER**



**Current Production  
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S P E C T A T O R

Twelfth Year

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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No. 2

APRIL 24, 1937

Volume 12

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*Sidney Howard Has Strange  
Screen Opinions*

*What the Future Holds for  
Motion Pictures*

*Camera Technique and Dialogue*

*Another in the Series of Special Articles  
By the Editor on the Fundamentals  
of Picture Production*

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From the

# Editor's Easy Chair

**U**NDER a page-wide screamer, "Union of Stage and Screen Held Vital to Future," *Los Angeles Times* of April 11, has this to say: "The stage and screen must unite for a common purpose, the development of the actors of the future. Without such a union each will face great difficulties, if not disaster. Picture players, who lack experience in the professional theatre, are at a special disadvantage, which will become a real problem in the future for the studios. Such is the opinion of Sidney Howard, the dramatist who divides time between the footlight and film mediums and who was elected to make the movie adaptation of *Gone With the Wind*, most celebrated book of the past several years."

Quoting Howard directly, the article goes on to say: "Just lately I saw a young actress on the screen who has been singled out for much praise. She has splendid personal qualities and genuine talent. She was appearing in an important picture when I viewed her. But the effect of her work was disappointing, because she could not meet demands in scenes with experienced actors who were in the same production. One felt constantly that she was failing to bring the scene up to the same high point that the more proficient had reached. And yet she was potentially excellent."

**W**HAT experience Howard has had to qualify him as an authority on screen fundamentals I do not know. Of record is only the fact of his employment to write for the screen, and as his only training has been in writing for the stage, it is reasonable to assume he will apply stage technique to his screen writing job. The trouble with him and with all other Broadway personages is that they think in terms of the stage when considering a screen problem. They are unaware the screen is an individual art in no way related to the art of the stage. Howard is no more competent to discuss the screen than his record shows he is competent to discuss architecture or mural painting. He sees the screen only through the **eyes** of the stage. If he were qualified to discuss the screen he could not have made the remarks credited to him.

If we took the playwright seriously we would lament Shirley Temple's lack of stage training and ascribe ignorance to the world for making her its outstanding box-office favorite; we would dismiss as unworthy of remembrance Janet Gaynor's performance in *Seventh Heaven*, all the screen appearances of Myrna Loy, Bette Davis, Greta Garbo, Gary Cooper, Ronald Colman, Norma

Shearer, Joel McCrea, Harold Lloyd, Robert Taylor, Freddie Bartholomew, and scores of others the poor, deluded public, lacking Howard's sense of entertainment values, has established as its favorites. And, according to Howard, unless all these players are banished from the screen until they have taken a course in stage training, Hollywood "will face great difficulties, if not disaster."

**A**GOOD bet would be that the young actress whose lack of experience caused Howard almost to weep, was the only one in the group of players who was giving a screen performance, the only one in step with the task in hand. There is not even remote relationship between screen and stage acting, and the acting of a screen actress is harmed in the degree it reflects the influence of the stage. The stage is an art of vocal projection to an audience of simulated emotions; the screen an art of feeling emotions for a camera to record. On the stage free expression is hampered by mechanical restrictions, the necessity for facing the audience, for working within prescribed limits, but most of all for having to project the voice to the farthest seat in the top gallery.

On the motion picture set everything is different. The characters can face in any direction the scene dictates; the camera moves around in front of them. A player can whisper and the microphone carries the whisper to every seat in the house. There is no voice projection—a single item which in itself makes the two schools of acting separate and distinct. But a still greater difference between the two is that the screen's most potent acting element is outside the range of stage possibilities. I refer to the players' eyes.

**R**ECALL the scene in *Lloyds of London* in which Sir Guy Standing charges Tyrone Power with the grave crime of treachery. There are perhaps a dozen cuts to close-ups of Power as Standing upbraids him. Power's face is immobile, he utters no words; only his eyes are alive, but so alive that we follow his thoughts as easily as if he were putting them in words. The very thing which makes the scene effective, which gives it strength, is one of the things it is impossible for the stage to teach or to use of it had it. It also is one of the many things which prove the vast superiority of the screen over the stage as a medium of expression.

But disaster, says Howard, will overtake the screen unless it blends its art with that of the stage. He might

as well argue that good liquor is strengthened by the addition of water. It is stage contamination which today is forcing the screen to keep itself alive with million-dollar productions, which has forced upon exhibitors the necessity for double bills and the giving away of money, automobiles and merchandise to lure audiences into film theatres. We had none of that when the screen was silent and the stage was forced to keep its hands off.

And on the eve of Mary Pickford's homeward flight to prepare for her wedding, it was ungallant of Howard inferentially to tell her it was America's ignorance, not the charm of her personality, which caused it to make her the country's sweetheart.

**A**NOTHER interview in the same *Los Angeles Times* quotes some of King Vidor's wise observations on things cinematic. "The two most cramping influences on motion picture art today," the *Times* quotes King as declaring, "are censorship and studio process photography." I will take his word on such a purely technical matter as process shots, but I am willing to argue the other point with him. And to avoid dismissing Sidney Howard too abruptly, I will point out to him that the hampering influence of strict censorship is another screen evil for which the stage is responsible. If the film industry had not abandoned its own business when the screen was given a voice, and started into the business of photographing the stage, the League of Decency probably never would have come into existence.

In its pure form the screen is an art of suggestion. It is totally unreal and all the entertainment an audience derives from it is the product of the imaginations of picture patrons. In the silent days you could take your little daughter to see a picture dealing with the infidelity of a wife. The story was told in the language of pictorial images. Nothing was explained in words. Your imagination fashioned its own story, which was one of the raw details of the actions of an unfaithful woman. Your daughter, knowing nothing of infidelity, fashioned another story, which as likely as not attributed the domestic discord to the wife's lack of cooking ability and not to her moral indiscretions, the latter being things outside the range of the little girl's knowledge.

Today's picture makes its story literal; it talks its way across the screen, explains everything, leaves nothing to the imagination. The League of Decency was not formed to protect you. It had your little girl in mind. Perhaps it would be a good thing if censorship were made still more restricting. It might force Hollywood back into the business of making motion pictures.

\* \* \*

**R**ENEWED efforts are being made by theatre owners to persuade film producers to cease the practice of radio-broadcasting abbreviated versions of pictures currently showing. When we consider those who object to this form of exploitation are those whom the producers feel they are benefitting, it would seem there must be merit in the protests, for theatre operators are in a better position than producers to determine the effect on the box-office of the radio advertising. Paramount thinks it is overcoming the objection of theatre owners by broad-

casting a picture program at an hour before film houses open. I do not believe prospective ticket-buyers remain at home to listen to Hollywood people on the air. The harm is done by the public's interest in viewing a picture being lessened by advance information as to what it is about and how it ends. I agree with theatre owners that they are justified in their efforts to put an end to such broadcasting.

\* \* \*

**W**ILL someone please tell me why producers of newsreels buy expensive voices to comment on the news pictures? Does the voice of Graham McNamee or his name add anything to the news value of a train wreck in Alabama or a championship ski contest in Europe? The whole film industry carries its zest for names too far, but newsreel makers take a positively nutty view of their value.

\* \* \*

**D**ISCUSSING Sonja Henie, *Film Weekly* (London), says: "Whether her skating can continue indefinitely to prove an attraction is difficult to say." Sonja's skating always will prove an attraction, but it will not give permanency to her rating as a screen star. Even fine acting, as such, will not sustain stardom. Rarely in a picture do we find the most highly paid and widely exploited player giving the best performance. The finest acting is done by those who play the minor parts. I could list two or three hundred men and women whose work on the screen is a joy to behold, but who always will play the less important roles because they lack what Sonja Henie possesses in such a large degree, that priceless screen asset, a personality so charming we fall in love with her and love everything she does. If she had a disagreeable personality, or none at all, her skating would lack the emotional appeal which makes complete our enjoyment of it. If instead of their constant search for acting talent, motion picture producers were on the alert to discover personalities, they would be serving box-offices better. Actors belong on the stage, personalities on the screen. Sonja Henie would be popular on the screen if she could skate no better than I can, and it is thirty years since I had a whack at it.

\* \* \*

**T**HE superiority of the camera over the microphone as a story-telling medium is demonstrated in almost every picture we see, yet producers remain in ignorance of it, if we may judge from the overdose of dialogue which every picture gives its audience. There is a scene in *Outcast* which illustrates visually the truth of this contention. Esther Dale plays the shrewish, domineering wife of John Wray, who is in constant fear of her. She has denounced Warren William as a murderer, and snarls at Wray, "How would you like it if you woke up some morning and found he had murdered me in my bed?" For the briefest instant the cowed countenance of Wray is illuminated by a flash of unholy joy at the mere thought of such a blessed relief—just a flash which comes and goes in practically the same instant. Attending previews of pictures which *Outcast* preceded on the screen, I have caught that scene three times. Each time it was greeted with a roar of laughter by the entire audience. All the writers in the world collaborating in putting its values in

dialogue could not arrange words to provoke such an impressive response. An audience in a theatre, which the screen constantly is aping, could not get it as the screen presents it. Such examples of the camera's right to recognition can be seen in any picture, but the constant chattering goes on and on until we wonder if production executives are honest enough to blush when they endorse their salary checks.

\* \* \*

**M**ENTAL MEANDERINGS: The night mist has sprinkled the wisteria vine with moist drops which the morning sun has transformed into diamonds; as I write, a mockingbird lights on a swaying branch and plucks the diamonds to assuage its thirst. . . . Civilization's greatest crime is war; those who start them, the greatest criminals. . . . If newsreels are to continue showing us shots of Governor Murphy, of Michigan, I hope someone will persuade him to have his eyebrows plucked. . . . Pulverize some graham crackers, put them in a dish in your yard and watch the mockingbirds enjoy them. . . . A memory: Hearing Cavalleria Rusticana in its entirety as a number on the program of a London variety theatre, Mascagni himself conducting; orchestra, cast and chorus brought from Italy for the week's engagement. . . . A fine bit of sport writing was Bill Henry's account in *Los Angeles Times* of Bill Sefton's sensational leap when a couple of weeks ago he broke the world's pole-vaulting record. . . . During that last pause I discovered what a bum shot I am with the fly-swatter. . . . With the assistance of a 79-cent sharpener I have used the same five razor blades so long that Mr. Gillette must be wondering whatever has happened to me. . . . Dick Foran's singing is tops. . . . I'm about ready to see some more of Fred Astaire's dancing and hear some more of Jeanette MacDonald's singing. . . . From *Variety*: "Will Hays will soon receive a strongly worded protest from St. Louis exhibitors against any move on the part of producers to exercise S. A. in new pix." Pictures can do without any more sex appeal, but they could stand a lot more of another S. A.—screen art. . . . New manifestations of rural life: Bo Peep, the Peke, has just paraded past me with Alexandra, one of the ducks, hanging onto her tail; Mrs. Spectator, sitting on the back doorstep, feeding lettuce by hand to Sophie, our other duck. . . . Work's over for the day! Bill von Brincken just arrived with a load of coreopsis plants from his garden; he doesn't know it yet, but he's going to help me plant them.

\* \* \*

**T**HE inherent strength of the screen as an individual art will see it through. Its hope lies in the hands of those who now are studying it. Those who control it are serving a useful purpose in perfecting organizations to take care of the physical aspect of production and distribution. The great film companies are functioning smoothly and efficiently, and the artistic efforts of those into whose hands the production of pictures must pass, will be kept within reasonable commercial limits by "front office" officials who, by that time, will be realizing that the inward flow of profits depends upon the de-

gree in which the principles of screen art are observed in the outward flow of pictures.

The prosperity of the film industry rises and falls in sympathy with fluctuations in public contentment with the screen entertainment offered it. Today the business dominates the art, but the art never must dominate the business. They must be equal partners. Even this readjustment of balance will be a revolution, as the businessmen who now control the business are unaware of the existence of the art.

But the art can go too far. At present a constant criticism of the screen is that it produces nothing permanent, that its greatest picture showing today is a thing of the past, forgotten, tomorrow. Commentators, to make their lamentations graphic, point to great plays which have stood the test of years, to books which live on, and of deathless paintings hanging on the world's walls. If the screen belongs to the family of arts, they urge, where are its great creations to prove it?

**E**VERY day screen art demonstrates its greatness, its unlimited sweep, its wealth of esthetic possibilities, its vast superiority over all other forms of expression. The author's pen and the painter's brush are weak tools when compared with the motion picture camera. Critics of the screen overlook its mission and the limitations within which it must function. It cannot move faster than its mechanical development. Its creations are fabricated by machines and the machines must set their pace. A better way is found tomorrow to do what was done today, consequently today's creation is old-fashioned tomorrow. This condition will continue, for mechanical genius is ever restless. Sound recording and cinematic photography are still in their infancy, the former but a decade old and the latter but half a century. What other art has developed its mechanics so rapidly?

But even if the mechanics of screen art had reached a point of perfection past which no further progress could be made or would be found necessary, there still remains its mission to be considered. Its mission is not to create for tomorrow. A film creation which attains a degree of perfection comparable with that which makes a painting or a book deathless—and already we have pictures which can boast as much—cannot be hung on a wall or placed on a library shelf. It must go down the ages coiled in a can, for each day there is a new picture to take its place on the screen.

The art itself is for the ages, but its product is as alive as this morning's newspaper and as dead as yesterday's. What life a screen creation has is in the memories of those who see it. There is no time limit on the thrill *The Birth of a Nation* gave you, the way *The Miracle Man* stirred you, the excitement you felt when you viewed the chariot race in *Ben-Hur*, or your emotional reaction to the human quality of the first screen version of *Seventh Heaven*. They are even more companionable memories than those you have of the picture you saw last week, for they have been mellowed by the passing years. Physically a motion picture is a thing of today; esthetically it lives as long as memory.

**E**VELYN BRENT has a brief scene in Paramount's *The King of Diamonds*. As attractive looking as ever, with a good speaking voice and knowledge of how to use it, and enough acting ability to make her scene outstanding, her contribution to the picture deepens the mystery of her disappearance from the screen. The ways of our film barons is past all understanding. Any other industry on earth would make use first of those who had proved competent in its service. So would the film industry if competence started in its front offices.

\* \* \*

**L**ABOR troubles, it seems, are threatening the film industry. The SPECTATOR has no intention of leaping the sidelines and getting into the fray. It is afraid, though, the producing organizations may be forced to pay for their folly in being disloyal to employes. When one contemplates all those who served pictures faithfully, whom audiences knew and liked, and who today cannot find work, many of them in want, their children not getting a fair break while the children of recently imported players are living in luxury—when we survey that condition we probably will laugh if producers urge loyalty as a reason why their employes should stand by them in the present emergency. It is unreasonable to expect disloyalty to beget loyalty.

\* \* \*

**F**OR some time I have been trying to cool down sufficiently to write placidly about the signing of strip-tease girls for appearances on the screen. Of all the damned disgusting manifestations of—I mean, of all the strange things our producers do, I know of none with less to justify it than the appearance on the screen of a girl whose only right to recognition was gained by her practice of undressing before audiences. If censorship provisions were sufficiently elastic to permit the inclusion in pictures of the undressing act, we could charge producers then only with bad taste; but it is something worse than bad taste when we see the undresser on the screen with the implied explanation: "Pipe this dame! She's the girl who undresses in front of hundreds of men! The management regrets that censorship restrictions prevent the showing of her undressing on the screen." It is explained the undressing act has become an art. Even so, that is not what gives it its box-office value, and it is not as artists the undressers will be presented to screen audiences. Their only claim to fame is the fact of their having outraged the general conception of modesty.

\* \* \*

**T**HE talkie version of *Seventh Heaven* is just about as good as a talkie can be, yet critics in cities where it is showing are finding fault with it. In almost every case criticism is based on memory of the outstanding qualities of the silent version, a comparison Century invited when it made a talkie of a motion picture which had made such a lasting impression. Despite the critics, the picture is doing satisfactory business in most places where it is showing. In Hollywood and Los Angeles it ran for one week to ordinary business, and nowhere have the box-office receipts been such as to set it apart from the usual run of

screen entertainment now showing. In fact, it is just an ordinary good talkie. The same story told in silent technique was a sensational success. It ran for twenty-one weeks, six days, at the Carthay Circle Theatre here, and in nearly all other cities it had extended runs. Its leading roles were played by people whose names had no box-office value, and the play it was made from did not give it one-tenth the publicity the silent version gave the talkie. That Janet Gaynor's performance was better than Simone Simon's is offset by the fact that James Stewart's is much better than that contributed to the silent *Seventh Heaven* by Charlie Farrell. The talkie also had the advantage of having two widely exploited names in the leading roles. Hollywood's wholesale surrender to the microphone could be justified only if the talkie proved a greater success than the silent version. It is not so proving—not coming anywhere near it, but that means nothing whatever to Hollywood producers who never have understood the nature of the business they are in.

\* \* \*

**T**HE May Day sequence in *Maytime* is a striking example of the camera's power for graphic expression and its ability to create in the mind of its audience in a few minutes the impression it has been witnessing a full day's activities. Nothing in the sequence has story value on its own account, yet the apparently long series of picturesque scenes gives us visually the progress of the romance between Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy, and is assisted by very few lines of dialogue. What can be done in one sequence can be done in an entire picture. That is what the SPECTATOR has been trying to impress upon Hollywood ever since the screen went talkie.

\* \* \*

**M**OTION picture people have joined those urging Governor Merriam to pardon Tom Mooney. I hope their pleas will carry weight and that the governor will set Mooney free. I am as ignorant of the merits of the case as are the film personages who signed the petition, my interest in it being merely a desire to forget all about Tom Mooney. In jail he is doing more harm to our social structure than he possibly could if he were at large. If he had been paroled after serving a few years, today he would be a nobody; but while in prison he is a martyr, a victim of the oppressive hand of capitalism, a sacrifice to the cruelty of class prejudice, and a lot of other equally ridiculous things, all of which unite to keep alive the social disturbance which now is agitating the entire country. The people who have been working for Mooney's release all these years have little interest in him as a man. They are interested in him only as an excuse to raise a row about existing conditions. By all means, set him free and let us turn our minds to things of importance. For instance, take Alexandra, one of our ducks, Sophie being the other. The two of them had no community husband, but that did not deter Alex from setting on three unfertile eggs. As there can be no end to an effort to hatch unhatchable eggs, I got three fertile ones from a neighbor and put them under her. Now we are in daily expectancy of an addition to our Valley home. And, as you go through life, a thing like that is far more important than a lot of other things we read in the papers.

# Some Late Previews

## Another Warner Hit

THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER, First National production, Warners release. Executive producer, Robert Lord; directed by William Keighley; from the Mark Twain tale; screen play by Laird Doyle; dramatic version, Catherine Chisholm Cushing; assistant director, Chuck Hansen; photographed by Sol Polito; film editor, Ralph Dawson; art director, Robert Haas; gowns by Milo Anderson; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; music by Erich Wolfgang Korngold. Cast: Errol Flynn, Claude Rains, Henry Stephenson, Barton MacLane, Billy Mauch and Bobby Mauch, Alan Hale, Eric Portman, Lionel Pape, Leonard Willey, Murray Kinnell, Halliwell Hobbes, Phyllis Barry, Ivan Simpson, Montagu Love, Fritz Leiber, Elspeth Dudgeon, Mary Field, Forrester Harvey, Helen Valkis, Lester Matthews, Robert Adair, Harry Cording, Robert Warwick, Rex Evans, Holmes Herbert, Ian MacLaren, Ann Howard, Gwendolyn Jones, Lionel Belmore, Ian Wolf, St. Luke's Choristers. Running time, 115 minutes.

**A**NOTHER extraordinary demonstration of the limitless possibilities of screen entertainment. Warner Brothers bring to the screen a royal phantasy with all the trappings of the period when courts had more regard for their garb than for purity in their morals or honor in their conduct of public affairs. The picture takes us back four hundred years and tells a story possible only then. Magnificently mounted by Warners and ably directed by William Keighley, the human values do not suffer in competition with the lavish spectacle provided by the studio art department under the guidance of Robert Haas. Pomp and circumstance are built into the striking sets which Sol Polito's camera transforms into pictures to delight the eye. The costumes designed with extraordinary skill and taste by Milo Anderson, are one of the outstanding features of the elaborate production.

That identical twins were available for a story which demanded them was a stroke of extraordinary luck for the producers. Billy and Bobby Mauch, more alike than most two peas which come from the same pod, not only provide their roles with the visual quality which makes them startling, but give them expression in a manner that would be a credit to the most seasoned actors. Keighley's direction of the boys is one of his finest contributions to the long series of fine things he accomplished in developing the human qualities of the story. From all his long list of players he gets only superlative performances, each fitting nicely into its place in the whole elaborate pattern until we feel we have been transported back four centuries to participate in things which happened then. We are not looking at actors; we are contemporary with the period and are getting an intimate view of its important personages, each going his devious way.

**O**NE of the most compelling performances is that of Montagu Love as Henry VIII. His powerfully dramatic death scene was applauded loudly by the people on the set when it was shot, rather an unusual tribute to an actor; and the large preview audience also rewarded it with a spontaneous burst of applause. Love for years has been available to Hollywood producers, but we have been seeing him but seldom, parts which he could play magnificently being filled by imported players whose ability

cannot be compared with his. And the same can be said of many scores of players who have been victims of the stupidity of those in command of picture production. Claude Rains' is another outstanding contribution to the acting excellence of *The Prince and the Pauper*. His villainy was rewarded by warm applause as he made his final exit.

To mention individually all those whose portrayals reflect the highest degree of merit would be but to repeat the list of names you will find above. In the previous SPECTATOR I credited *Another Dawn* with being the last screen story written by the late Laird Doyle. I was in error, as he wrote also the *Prince and Pauper* script, and a splendid job he made of it. A strong feature of the production is the musical setting given it by Erich Wolfgang Korngold, composer and Leo. Forbstein, musical director. Under the guidance of these two skillful artists, music is becoming a constantly increasing factor in Warner productions.

**O**NE cannot get away from the fact that the picture as previewed drags somewhat due to its leisurely pace and to its inclusion toward the end of a protracted, even though condensed, version of the ceremonies attending the coronation of an English king. The producers were presented with the rare opportunity of showing such a ceremony on the screen concurrently with its enactment in Westminster Abbey today. However they display a greater sense of news values than they did of cinematic values. Their method of treating the coronation sequence harms the picture greatly. It is a magnificent spectacle, directed and acted with the greatest skill, but, unfortunately, it comes to the screen at a time when we are thinking of something else and become impatient by virtue of its being an intrusion we resent.

The pauper (Billy) is about to be crowned as King. Our sympathy has been enlisted for both boys, but not to the extent of our being indifferent as to which one is crowned. We want the real king to ascend the throne, both because we love him and desire to see Rains punished for his villainy. If the picture has succeeded in entertaining us, our sympathy is with Bobby whom Errol Flynn has rescued from his would-be murderers. As the coronation sequence slowly unwinds, we are wondering what has happened to Bobby; we wish all the regal tomfoolery would stop long enough to show us that he would reach the Abbey in time to take his rightful place. If we knew that, we could regard complacently the whole ceremony, our fears would be allayed. But each minute such knowledge is denied us seems like an hour, and the ceremony not only waries us by what seems its interminable length, but makes us mad at the producers for keeping us in ignorance.

After the preview I mentioned this weakness to a Warner executive. "But that is what we want," he said, "we want the audience to be wondering about Bobby." To spend a couple of hundred thousand dollars to provide entertainment for an audience whose mind is on something else, may be good business. My view of it, however, is that it is picture insanity in its most virulent form.

## A New Bob Montgomery

**NIGHT MUST FALL**, Metro production and release. Hunt Stromberg, producer. Stars Robert Montgomery and Rosalind Russell. Features Merle Tottenham, Kathleen Harrison, Alan Marshal, Dame May Whitty and Matthew Boulton. Directed by Richard Thorpe; from the play by Emyln Williams; screen play by John Van Druten; musical score by Edward Ward; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Fredric Hope and Edwin B. Willis; photographed by Ray June; film editor, Robert J. Kern. Supporting cast: Eily Malyon, Beryl Mercer, E. E. Clive, Winifred Harris. Running time, 115 minutes.

**BOB MONTGOMERY** presents us in this picture with an astonishing psychological study of an egomaniac with a homicidal complex. Nothing Bob ever previously did on the screen quite prepared us for the extraordinary ability he displays in mastering the lights and shades of such an exacting characterization as the leading figure in this purely psychological drama. He is present in nearly all the scenes, the story is about him, and the intellectual nature of the offering invites critical judgment of his performance, yet not for a single instant does he falter or lower the excellent standard he sets on his first appearance. So completely has he absorbed the part that even in scenes prior to those which make us suspect his dementia, there is a gleam of it in his eyes. At all times he maintains some fascinating quality, some mysterious undercurrent of emotion, a suggestion of irresponsibility, which completely captures the attention of the audience and keeps its nerves on edge by expectation of a dramatic denouement which may come at any moment.

And when it comes, when the homicidal tendencies of the young man are established, Montgomery rises to such histrionic heights that the audience sits spellbound through one of the most tense climaxes a motion picture ever has presented. A woman sitting in front of me expressed it correctly, when she said to her companion as the two of them rose from their seats prior to the closing scene, "Let's go; it's getting on my nerves; I must leave before I pass out." It was brave casting by Hunt Stromberg to assign such a part to a young actor who had done nothing on the screen to prove his qualifications to handle it adequately, but Bob justifies his selection by delivering a performance which in one jump puts him among the few screen players who are entitled to be called great. Even his Irish accent is authentic, has that lilt which distinguishes it and gives it individuality.

**ROSALIND RUSSELL** is another who justifies her casting in such an exacting role as that of the young woman who from the first suspects the working of Montgomery's mind. Her performance, too, is a study in psychology, beautifully developed and sustained in a manner which makes logical its powerful climax. She is fascinated by the young murderer even to the point of protecting him when it seems inevitable the hand of the law is to be placed on his shoulder. In *Night Must Fall* Rosalind is not just the attractive girl each picture has to adorn it; she is a distraught young woman, swayed by powerful emotions for all that she moves quietly through the picture, never raises her voice, gives little physical manifestation of her inward unrest. We see it in her eyes, in her quizzical glances, in the intonation of her voice more than in what she says.

Another member of the cast who distinguishes herself by the brilliance of her performance is Dame May Whitty, an English woman honored by her country for her contribution to its stage. I was prepared to quarrel with her selection on the ground of her importation to play a part which could have been assigned to any one of several character women who have served pictures for years and now need work, but Dame Whitty's performance has that completeness which makes it impossible to visualize anyone else in the role. I applaud her and hope to see her in many more pictures. Merle Tottenham, Kathleen Harrison, Alan Marshal and Matthew Boulton are others who make valuable contributions to the picture.

**RICHARD THORPE'S** direction of *Night Must Fall* moves him into the first rank of directors, something one could anticipate after noticing how expert has been his handling of the class B productions to which Metro previously had assigned him. This one, his first of major importance, presented no easy task. In essence a sordid, unlovely tale, dressed in fashionable clothes and told in the refined quiet of a sheltered rural English home; lending itself only to intellectual development without the assistance of physical thrills, it offered a challenge to directional brains to make it entertaining to an audience. Thorpe accepted the challenge and acquitted himself nobly. He has to his credit as his first class A job one of the really outstanding pictures of the talkie era, a really brilliant example of intelligent direction.

John Van Druten's screen play of course had to be a well done writing job to make possible such satisfactory results. One could have wished for a little more reliance on the camera and less on the microphone in the story development, but that is too much to expect since Hollywood substituted talkies for motion pictures. Ray June's camera work, always a feature of a picture he photographs, is fully up to the high standard he has set, and Cedric Gibbons and associates provided settings in complete pictorial sympathy with the atmosphere of the production.

## Notable Production

**THE WOMAN I LOVE**, Radio production for RKO release. Albert Lewis, producer. Stars Paul Muni and Miriam Hopkins. Directed by Anatole Litvak; screen play by Ethel Borden; from the novel, *L'EQUIPAGE*, by Joseph Kessel; musical director, Roy Webb; musical score by Arthur Honegger and Maurice Thiriet; photographed by Charles Rosher; special effects by Vernon L. Walker; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate, Perry Ferguson; sets, Darrell Silvera; edited by Henri Rust. Supporting cast: Louis Hayward, Colin Clive, Minor Watson, Elizabeth Risdon, Paul Guilfoyle, Wally Albright, Mady Christians, Alec Craig, Owen Davis, Jr., Sterling Holloway, Vince Barnett, Adrian Morris, Donald Barry, Joe Twerp, William Stelling. Running time, 85 minutes.

**ALBERT LEWIS**, RKO producer, has given us in this picture the most impressive treatment I can recall the screen having accorded a triangle story. Without being aware of her identity, a French officer falls in love with a woman whose husband later becomes his best friend and flying companion in the World War. Not until the friendship is cemented does the young officer learn the woman he loves and who loves him is the wife of the man he respects so highly. There you have the



story—not much to it and already told on the screen a few hundred times. But here we have it told against the war background, and so impressively has Lewis produced his war sequences, *The Woman I Love* rates about as high as a war picture as it does as a tragic romance.

As a matter of fact, it is not the story which entertains us. No picture we have had comes as near being the perfect talkie form as this one does with its blending of dialogue and cinematic values. It lacks only a continuous score to make it a practically perfect example of talkie treatment. Slowly Hollywood is developing technique to make less dialogue necessary to the understanding of its stories, but it is developing no progress whatever in learning what part music should play in screen presentations. As far as it goes, this picture makes good use of a spotty but excellent score composed by Arthur Honogger and Maurice Thiriet and ably directed by Roy Webb. What music we have in some sequences serves to make noticeable the lack of it in the rest of the sequences. It is strange that so much creative intelligence can be displayed in presenting all the other elements of a screen production and so little understanding of the part music should play.

**E**THEL BORDEN has written a really brilliant screen play from the novel, *L'Equipage*, by Joseph Kessel, nicely balancing its various elements and fully developing its human qualities. She keeps the narrative moving briskly and lends story value to the sequences dealing with the purely physical aspects of the war scenes. Such scenes are presented with rare technical skill, Charles Rosher's photography being a notable contribution to the production. Vernon L. Walker earns commendation for the striking special effects which are a big part of the whole, and the art direction of Van Nest Polglase and his associate, Perry Ferguson, assists greatly in making the production so attractive visually. Henri Rust's film editing is another of the picture's big assets.

Anatole Litvak, European director who made his first impression on American audiences a few years ago with his *Be Mine Tonight*, starring Jan Kiepura, proves himself a valuable addition to Hollywood's directorial ranks. He had every variety of material to deal with in his first American script, romance, drama, scenes in a light vein, and stirring war spectacles, with the tragedy of young men killed in action; with the tragedy, too, of a man's discovery of his wife's love for his best friend, but Litvak brilliantly meets every demand made upon his skill and gives us a picture which will rate among the most imposing of the present production season. Particularly effective is he with the camera, revealing artistic appreciation of scene composition and symbolism which lends itself to pictorial interpretation.

**O**UTSTANDING as an example of symbolism as a story element is the director's depiction of the growing friendship of Paul Muni and Louis Hayward, the former a pilot and the latter an observer in the French air forces. Before their take-off for their first flight together, the two men shake hands, and superimposed on scenes which show a long series of stirring and heroic adven-

tures they have together, are the clasped hands signifying the growth of their friendship. The sequence tells the whole story of their mutual regard without a word of dialogue and without our seeing more than hands of the two comrades. It is pure cinema, a reminder to those who have forgotten the camera is the screen's only legitimate story-telling medium.

Paul Muni's performance, too, is as pure cinematically as the dialogue given him permits him to make it. No matter how many others share a scene with him, irrespective of how still and quiet he may be and active and noisy the others are, it is Muni who draws our attention by the strong spiritual quality inherent in him as an artist and developed concurrently with his mastery of the mechanics of his art. His role is really a negative one; he is the victim of circumstances he neither initiates nor can control; if played by an actor who was less an artist it would be one of the picture's secondary characterizations and our interest would be held by Hayward and Miriam Hopkins. But so great is Muni's command of his art that it is his picture; his interests hold our attention, his spirit dominates even the scenes in which he does not appear and which get their story strength from the effect that what is developed in them will have on him.

Miss Hopkins gives the usual thoroughly competent performance she has taught us to expect from her, and Hayward and Colin Clive also respond ably to Litvak's direction. A boy, Wally Albright, is another bright spot.

## Universal Has a Good One

**AS GOOD AS MARRIED**, Universal. Charles R. Rogers, executive producer; directed by Edward Buzzell; associate producer, E. M. Asher; screen play, F. Hugh Herbert and Lynn Starling; original story by Norman Krasna; photographer, Merritt Gerstad, A.S.C.; production designed by John Harkrider; associates, sets, Jack Martin Smith; gowns, Albert Nickels and Vera West; film editor, Philip Cahn; musical director, Charles Previn; special effects, John P. Fulton; sound, Charles Carroll and Edwin Wetzel. Cast: Doris Nolan, John Boles, Walter Pidgeon, Alan Mowbray, Tala Birell, Katharine Alexander, Mary Philips, Ernest Cossart, David Oliver, Harry Davenport, Esther Ralston, Dorothea Kent, Elsa Christian, Walter Byron.

**T**HIS time Universal has made it—the one about the man marrying his secretary for material reasons and then falling in love with her. You already have seen it on the screen scores of times, which is no reason whatever why you should not see *As Good As Married*. If you like to bring a little intelligence to bear in your contemplation of screen entertainment, the fact of your knowing the story as soon as it starts adds interest for you in the manner in which scenarist, director and players work their way through it to the known end. It is not the story which entertains you in a film theatre; it is the manner in which it is told, and the more familiar you are with what is told, the better you can appreciate the manner of its telling. So do not turn down the Universal picture because you already know the story.

You will find it a bit of delightful entertainment, a gay, briskly moving bit of amusement, well written, well acted and particularly well directed. It has, too, more of the sets designed by John Harkrider, who rapidly is coming to the front as one of the most accomplished art directors Hollywood has possessed. Certainly he has made

*As Good As Married* a most attractive production from the visual standpoint. I notice by the credits that Harkrider has control also over the designing of the gowns worn in the picture. That will account for the perfect blending of all the elements which are parts of the composition of scenes. The results achieved in this production would indicate the wisdom of trusting all the visual values of a screen creation to the artistic sense of one person with the ability to realize them. It certainly proves wise in the case of Harkrider.

**E**DWARD BUZZELL to my knowledge never previously directed a picture as gaily as he has directed this one. He keeps it bubbling from beginning to end, and except for a tendency now and then to permit his people to read lines too loudly to match the mood of scenes, has turned in a flawless job. Skilfully has he worked what really is extraneous comedy into his story without delaying its forward motion. It holds our continuous interest, and that is all we can ask of any screen offering.

All the performances of the carefully selected cast are excellent. It is a smart comedy, smartly mounted, and in appearance the players match it in smartness. Doris Nolan makes her third strong bid for popularity, being wholly satisfactory in all the phases of her characterization. John Boles gives another of the outstanding performances he has taught us to expect from him. For such a good singer to be such a good actor is quite out of the ordinary. He does not sing in this picture; instead he gives us a performance sufficiently pleasing without the addition of vocal interludes.

Again Alan Mowbray demonstrates his outstanding ability as a comedian, earning credit for a large share of the sparkling quality maintained throughout. Walter Pidgeon, Tala Birell, Katharine Alexander and Mary Philips also make big contributions. Esther Ralston has a small part. As beautiful as ever, with unquestioned acting ability, her neglect by producers is one of the leading screen mysteries. She is one of the best bets available to pictures.

## Some Comments on Acting

**INTERNES CAN'T TAKE MONEY**, Paramount production and release. Produced by Benjamin Glazer; directed by Alfred Santell; screen play by Rian James and Theodore Reeves; based on story by Max Brand; art directors, Hans Dreier and Roland Anderson; photographed by Theodor Sparkuhl; musical direction, Boris Morros; original music by Gregory Stone; assistant director, Roland Asher. Cast: Barbara Stanwyck, Joel McCrea, Lloyd Nolan, Stanley Ridges, Lee Bowman, Barry Macollum, Irving Bacon, Gaylord Pendleton, Pierre Watkin, Charles Lane, James Bush, Nick Lukats, Anthony Nace, Fay Holden, Frank Bruno. Running time, 75 minutes.

**W**HEN Barbara Stanwyck's first picture appeared on the screen, I fell head-over-heels in love with her and have continued, through her good roles and bad, to be her loyal admirer. Once I saw a stalwart young fellow on the screen, inquired his name and wrote in the *SPECTATOR* that Joel McCrea would be heard from as he possessed everything the screen demands; and since that time not one of Joel's appearances has failed to please me mightily. Both Barbara and Joel are blessed with gracious personalities which hold the interest of the

audience even in casual scenes which have little story significance; the audience accepts them as its friends, and one of our human impulses is to be interested in even the little things our friends do. These two young people retain their box-office strength by their nice combination of personality and talent.

So, when Barbara and Joel appear in a picture together, I know I am in for a good time even though they compose the sum total of the picture's virtues; they are my screen friends and anything they do interests me just as it interests all others who have the same feeling of friendship for them. That is what makes a charming personality a greater box-office asset than even superior acting by a player whose personality does not shine through his performance. Barbara and Joel merely happen to have acting talent to back up their personalities.

**B**UT they are not the only box-office qualities *Internes Can't Take Money* possesses. It has a brilliantly written screen play by Rian James and Theodore Reeves, a talented director in the person of Alfred Santell, a completely competent cast, some imposing sets by Hans Dreier and Roland Anderson, fine photography by Theodor Sparkuhl, and attractive musical treatment by Boris Morros. And behind it all was the discriminating production brain of Barney Glazer.

There are a few spots in which the story might move faster, and we could have been spared some of the close-ups of Barbara with her eyes flooded with tears, but these are but minor discords in the little symphony played on our emotions. Inherently a drab story, Santell highlights it with flashes of comedy until it becomes entertainment both delightful and gripping, the comedy touches in no way impeding its forward progress. He is one of the few directors who brought with him from silent pictures an appreciation of the part the camera should play in even a talkie. A hospital sequence which opens *Internes* is directed with rare skill. The routine of the institution, an exceedingly busy place, moves swiftly forward without effort to subdue the background voices, but always Santell succeeds in centering our attention on the essential story point.

**O**THER writers and directors should study this production. It will teach them something in the way of a departure in presenting romances. Barbara and Joel first meet as patient and doctor; the camera records their mutual attraction. They move side by side through the entire picture and the final fade-out shows Barbara in the foreground, clasping in her arms the young daughter, the discovery of whose whereabouts is the story's motivating element; Joel and the nun in charge of the orphanage standing quietly in the deep background. It is a completely happy ending. We know Barbara and Joel will marry and the child will have a happy home. But not in one scene is one word of love uttered by either Barbara or Joel, not one caress, not even a hand-holding gesture, yet it is one of the most beautiful and most complete romances ever filmed, thanks to fine writing and outstanding direction.

Another lesson this picture teaches is that it is good box-office to have strong supporting casts. There are no other outstanding box-office names in *Internes*, but Glazer has composed his long cast in a manner which enabled Santell to give us a series of beautifully balanced performances. Lloyd Nolan's stands out as brilliant characterization of a gambling boss who has no scruples about murdering a foe but who will go the limit for a friend. So well is it acted and so understandingly directed that the performance is both grim and amusing. Stanley Ridges, brought here from the New York stage to play a part which could have been played by any one of a hundred character actors already here, gives a fine performance but no finer than any one of the hundred could have contributed to the production.

**T**HE four most prominent roles are those I have mentioned, but all the acting honors do not go to them. Lately there has been growing upon me a consciousness of the important part the minor performers play in the completeness of a motion picture—even the one-line bits, the "Very good, sir," of a servant, "Good morning, Mrs. Smith; a letter for you," of the postman—all being small spots in the whole acting pattern but as important to its completeness as the star part. Take a secondary part—much more, of course, than a bit—in *Internes*, Irving Bacon's bartender. The general public will not hail it as an acting achievement. There is nothing in it to suggest the actor. Bacon acts it with so much skill, brings to it such a feeling of authenticity, that the audience will see him merely as a bartender and will go out talking about the swell performances of Barbara and Joel.

The young internes in the hospital sequence, the minor racketeers in other sequences—unsung artists, so easy and natural in their several bits that we accept them as we do the scenery; reviewers do not mention them, the public does not file their faces for future recognition; yet if it were not for the artistic merit of their contributions to the whole, we might leave the theatre with the impression that the star was beginning to slip, even though the star of the picture we had seen may have given the greatest performance of his or her career.

## Saved By Good Direction

**KING OF GAMBLERS**, Paramount. Director, Robert Florey; story, Tiffany Thayer; screen play, Doris Anderson; photographer, Harry Fischbeck; musical direction, Boris Morros; film editor, Harvey Johnston; assistant director, John Burch. Cast: Claire Trevor, Lloyd Nolan, Akim Tamiroff, Larry Crabbe, Helen Burgess, Porter Hall, Harvey Stephens, Barlow Borland, Purnell Pratt, Colin Tapley, Paul Fix, Cecil Cunningham, Robert Gleckler, Nick Lukats, Fay Holden, John Patterson, Evelyn Brent.

**T**HE heroine, the kept woman of a murderer; the hero, a reporter who, when we first meet him, is beastly drunk; one of the important sequences, even though wholly unbelievable, played in a house of prostitution. By all means take the children.

Regarded purely from the standpoint of its atmosphere, *The King of Gamblers* is a disgusting exhibition of how low the screen can go in the selection of its story material. When we look at it from a cinematic standpoint we find

there is much in it of interest. Doris Anderson, one of our better scenarists and a young woman with a grasp of screen values, here follows the trend of the day and tells her story in dialogue, even though it is a story of action which cries out for camera treatment. If Miss Anderson had written it that way, no doubt it would have come to the screen with, "Additional dialogue by —."

When Bob Florey read the script it is unlikely he wore a gas mask, thereby getting the full flavor of it and seeing at once that something would have to be done to keep the audience so busily engaged in watching what was happening that it would have no time to give heed to the atmosphere. The result is one of the most swiftly moving pictures we have had in a long time, even though the people on the screen are not in a hurry in even one sequence.

**P**ARAMOUNT has mounted the picture handsomely, the characters are dressed in the height of fashion, for the most part the dialogue is carried on in appropriately low tones, but there are some scenes which lack impressiveness by virtue of loud talking not consistent with their mood, a surprising fault for a director as intelligent as Florey. But Bob redeems himself by his masterly handling of the action and his direction of the players. Come to think of it, though, there is another fault. The editor of a paper visits the elaborate apartment of a young woman and keeps his hat on all the time he is in her presence. We editors, I will have Bob know, are not quite so lowbrow as that. Or was he consciously taking a crack at us? It is possible.

Lloyd Nolan, as the reporter, Akim Tamiroff, as the king of gamblers, and Claire Trevor, as the gangster's moll, play the leading parts, and no one could wish for three better performances. Larry Crabbe, stalwart, handsome, and with ability to play bigger parts than have been assigned him, makes his presence felt. Paramount is not realizing the possibilities of this young man. A pathetic note in the picture is the appearance of Helen Burgess. The last we see of her is as a nurse pulls a sheet over her face in a hospital sequence. A short time after her work in the picture was completed, a real nurse in a real hospital gently pulled a sheet over the face of the real Helen Burgess, a cruel gesture of fate to bring such a promising career to an end just as it was beginning.

Porter Hall and Harvey Stephens are others in the cast whose performances are excellent. Added strength is given by the competent work of those in the minor roles. Harry Fischbeck's photography is of distinct merit, the picture containing many of the striking compositions to be found in all Florey's productions.

**T**HERE will be no lack of audience interest in *The King of Gamblers*. Its swift forward movement will hold the close attention of those who see it. The dialogue and action will keep both the ears and eyes alert and when it ends those in the audience will have had quite enough screen entertainment to last them a few days. Therein lies the difference between the talkie and the true motion picture form. Three-fourths of the dialogue

in this Paramount production could have been eliminated if Miss Anderson had been permitted to write a motion picture instead of a talkie. If this treatment had been given it, if it had been visual entertainment, the audience could have viewed it in complete relaxation. The success of the silent picture was due principally to its restful quality, to the fact that it appealed to the imagination, thus permitting it to see in it what pleased it most.

*The King of Gamblers* is so literal in telling its unsavory story that its audience will be limited to those who like that sort of thing. If it had been told almost entirely in visual terms, as it well could have been, its odor would have been only what the audience would have created and there would have been little chance of its being condemned by reviewing organizations, as it surely will be. As it is presented it is just an unlovely mess for which there is no excuse. Its lesson is unmoral. About all it would teach a young girl looking for a life of ease and luxury, as all young girls dream of, is to pick up a personable gambler-murderer and become his kept woman.

### Cleverness Its Outstanding Feature

WAKE UP AND LIVE, 20th-Fox production and release. Kenneth Macgowan, associate producer; directed by Sidney Lanfield; screen play by Jack Yellen and Harry Tugend; original story by Curtis Kenyon; from book by Dorothea Brande; music by Mack Gordon and Harry Revel; photographed by Edward Cronjager; art direction, Mark-Lee Kirk and Haldane Douglas; sets, Thomas Little; assistant director, A. F. Erickson; film editor, Robert Simpson; costumes, Gwen Wakeling; musical direction, Louis Silvers. Cast: Walter Winchell, Ben Bernie and his Orchestra, Alice Faye, Patsy Kelly, Ned Sparks, Jack Haley, Walter Catlett, Grace Bradley, Joan Davis, Leah Ray, Miles Mander, Douglas Fowley, Etienne Girardot, Barnett Parker, Paul Hurst, Warren Hymer, Condos Brothers, Brewster Twins, George Givot, William Demarest, John Sheehan, Robert Lowery, Charles Williams, Ed Gargan, George Chandler, Gary Breckner. Running time, 92 minutes.

**C**ENTURY comes through with what appeals to me as the cleverest musical picture we have had in the past twelve months. Universal gave us *Top of the Town* in which sets designed by John Harkrider played the leading part. In *Wake Up and Live* Century gives us one in which the story plays the leading part. For downright cleverness it beats anything else we have had in a picture of the sort. Most of such stories are little more than bursts of dialogue between singing, dancing or orchestra numbers, and there is not enough body to the stories to hold our continuous interest. But Curtis Kenyon's original and Harry Tugend and Jack Yellen's screen play for *Wake Up* keep our interest alive. The Universal story possessed the same virtue, but was not presented as well. The Century picture centers our interest in Jack Haley and builds the interest so completely it carries through all the special numbers.

Haley handles his part well. He gains our sympathy and we are sorry he is so scared of the microphone that he cannot be the success in radio his singing voice entitles him to. He sings perhaps half a dozen times and each time we are rooting so strongly for him to make good we could excuse him even if his voice cracked. But it does not crack; and I do not think it can be quite as good as we think it is, for in our eagerness for his suc-

cess, we are inclined, no doubt, to credit it with greater merit than it possesses. There you have the formula that spells success for a musical-spectacle picture. When in a sequence a performer comes on cold and does a turn; when he or she is someone we do not know and have no interest in, the turn merely interrupts the continuity of our interest in the picture as a whole.

**T**HE Century picture has no such weakness. The story is kept alive in the most skilful manner. It moves quickly from one complication to another, threatening to end half a dozen times before it manages to, each complication giving it another boost forward to keep it alive until it finally dies a natural and happy death. The degree of interest it arouses and holds makes it just the right length, an accomplishment few screen productions have to their credit. Without reservation I can recommend it as an addition to the list of those you must see if you are looking for something in the way of competent direction and attractive mounting of a pleasant little story crowded with amusing incidents. The capable direction of Sidney Lanfield is responsible for a most satisfactory piece of screen entertainment.

An extraordinary accomplishment of the picture is that of interesting us in the interminable feud carried on by Walter Winchell and Ben Bernie in their radio broadcasting. It finally became very tiresome on the air and I expected it to bore me on the screen, but so cleverly is it handled in the picture it becomes one of its chief assets. There is not too much of it, and what there is is entertaining. And I will have you know that Walter and Ben are all right as actors. Alice Faye always pleases me, as much for her ingratiating personality as for her agreeable singing voice. Patsy Kelly and Ned Sparks make a fine comedy team. It is the first time Patsy pleased me completely, as generally she is too wild for my liking. Ned, too, is more pleasing than usual as we do not have too much of his monotonous drawl. Walter Catlett, always the capable actor, has a disagreeable part to play and handles it excellently. Several specialty artists make valuable contributions to this outstanding musical production.

### Has a Well Chosen Cast

THE GOOD OLD SOAK, M.G.M. Producer, Harry Rapf; director, J. Walter Ruben; story, Don Marquis; screen play, A. E. Thomas; photographer, Clyde DeVinna; score, Edward Ward; film editor, Frank Sullivan; assistant director, Walter Strohm. Cast: Wallas Beery, Janet Beecher, Una Merkel, Eric Linden, Judith Barrett, Betty Furness, Ted Healy, George Sidney, Robert McWade, James Bush, Margaret Hamilton.

**W**ALTER RUBEN handles this one with such a nice sense of story value that it comes to the screen as a piece of entertainment which should give satisfaction to any audience. One of its strong features is its strong cast of experienced and dependable players, the kind of cast it must delight a director to have at his disposal. Walter gets from all of them such capable and evenly balanced performances that he makes complete our illusion that we are witnessing a chapter in the lives of a group of ordinary people and do not consciously feel that either

actors or a director had anything to do with the things which transpire. It is the mission of art to conceal art, and Ruben has done it so well that it probably will not occur to anyone to give him the credit his efforts deserve.

The story, intelligently worked into a screen play strong in human values by A. E. Thomas, is a home-spun narrative with a small-town flavor even though its locale is in the vicinity of New York. Wally Beery, a likeable character in spite of his constant imbibing of strong liquor, gives one of the neatest performances he has to his credit, one scene which is shared by Robert McWade, being a particularly fine piece of work, its impressiveness enhanced by McWade's strong contribution to it. Second to Beery in the billing is Una Merkel who at last was given a part which enabled her to demonstrate what an excellent actress she is. She plays a servant girl with zest and understanding which makes her part stand out as one of the most entertaining in the picture.

**E**RIC LINDEN, one of our cleverest boys, plays a weakling so sincerely that he puts over his point of view and makes us sympathize with him in spite of his embezzlement of his employer's money. That means good acting. Ted Healy, one of our best comedians, also adds his bit to the list of good things. A feature of the production which will delight audiences is the presence in the cast of George Sidney, one of the most accomplished actors who ever served pictures, but whom blundering producers have been overlooking recently. His first appearance on the screen in *Old Soak* was greeted by the preview audience with a great burst of applause, and he responded with a performance that is an acting gem. James Bush, a young fellow whose screen appearances I always like, completes the male line-up. I still remember his *Ceiling Zero* performance and cannot understand why he is not seen oftener.

Janet Beecher, always the sincere and appealing player is well cast as the old soak's long-suffering wife. A character actress, whose excellent work must be developing for her a host of followers, is Margaret Hamilton. In this picture she adds one to the many fine characterizations to her credit. Betty Furness and Judith Barrett provide the girl element. Both are attractive in appearance and portray their roles capably.

The picture would have been improved if Beery's attire and general demeanor had been more in keeping with those of the other members of the family, and more consistent with the good taste displayed in the furnishings of the home. His speech, too, is so grossly ungrammatical that it is difficult to reconcile with the meticulously correct speaking of his wife and children. That is the only weakness of *The Good Old Soak*, but it is by no means an insignificant one.

## It Proves a Contention

TALES FROM THE VIENNA WOODS. Produced in Vienna, Austria, by Mondial Films. Story by Maria Stetan; music by Johann Strauss; played by Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra; producer, Dr. Victor Janovski; directed by Georg Jacoby; camera, Werner Brandes; sound, Martin Mueller. Cast: Magda Schneider, Wolf Albach-Retty, Leo Slezak, Georg Alexander, Truus van Aalten, Henry Lorenzen, Oskar Sabo.

**S**OMEONE telephones Count Rudi that he, the count, has inherited an old castle. The message reaches him where he works as an automobile salesman. He is delighted. Excitedly he asked for some particulars, and gets them. He is asked if he will accept the inheritance and he says he certainly will. When he finishes his telephone conversation he tells his good news to his associates in the motor concern, rushes out to a square and shouts news of his inheritance to the men, women and children assembled there, and receives their warm congratulations.

The dialogue in *Tales from the Vienna Woods* is in German, a language of which I am entirely ignorant. Titles in English are superimposed on scenes. All there was to assist the audience to understand as much of the opening of the story as I relate above, was this translation of two speeches: "You have inherited an old castle;" "Certainly I will accept the inheritance." The telephone conversation is an extended one and a lot of dialogue follows it, but those two speeches contain all the information American audiences will get to acquaint them with the reason for all the conversation and excitement, but it is quite enough. All the way through the production about the same percentage of the dialogue appears in English on the screen, but at no moment is the audience in doubt about the drift of the story.

**S**INCE sound came to pictures the SPECTATOR has contended that only speeches essential to the understanding of the story should be projected for the audience to hear, that a continuous score and camera technique should be employed to make it reasonable the audience should not hear the nonessential speeches. In this foreign picture all the dialogue except the extremely small percentage presented in the form of printed words is practically only a sound effect. That it was not necessary I should hear it was proven by the fact that I had no difficulty whatever in following the story despite my ignorance of the German language. If, however, the picture had been made in Hollywood with the lines read in English, the audience would have been forced to listen to the nineteen-twentieths of the dialogue not essential to its understanding of the story. I wish someone would tell me why all our pictures must force so much useless chatter on their audiences.

*Tales from the Vienna Woods*, now running at the Grand International, has not much to recommend it. In its billing it features the music of Johann Strauss, but on the screen it features too much comedy too silly to be entertaining, the music, though played by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, serving chiefly as a background for the general clamor. Direction is crude. In one scene a prince, seated with a young woman in a crowded cafe, proposes marriage to her in tones loud enough to be overheard by everyone in the place. That will give you an idea of the ability the director brought to his task. The Grand International is doing Hollywood a service in bringing foreign pictures here for it to see. It has presented many excellent ones and has others of equal merit booked, but the current one could be better.

## Reviews by Allan Hersholt

### It Made Them Laugh

**PUBLIC WEDDING**, Warners picture and release. Directed by Nick Grinde; screen play by Roy Chanslor and Houston Branch; from the story by Houston Branch; dialogue director, Reggie Hammerstein; photographed by L. William O. Connell; film editor, Frank Dewar; art director, Esdras Hartley; Elmer Decker, assistant director. Cast: Jane Wyman, William Hopper, Dick Purcell, Marie Wilson, Berton Churchill, James Robbins, Raymond Hatton, Veda Ann Borg, Zeni Vatori, Jimmy Foxe, Curtis Karpe, Carlyle Moore, Jr., Horace MacMahon, John Harron, Jack Mower, Lyle Moraine and James Burtis. Running time, 55 minutes.

AS I emerged from Warners' Beverly Theatre, after *Public Wedding* had bared itself in preview form, a chuckling confrere turned to me and voiced, "Swell picture, eh?" The chuckling passed and his countenance acquired an expression of slight amazement when the awaited concurrence failed to come. I could not, nor can I, recall having been a spectator at anything more irritatingly bad. He shrugged bewilderedly. "But you can't deny it made 'em laugh." No, I couldn't. It had evoked much laughter, the beholders occasionally creating such a gale that almost fearfully I had wondered if the surrounding structure would remain intact.

*Public Wedding* was able to gain not even a faint smile from this reviewer. It failed completely to entertain me, and yet I was intrigued. Intrigued at seeing and hearing an audience of supposedly sane persons enjoy stuff so inexcusably awful. With regret I report that the enterprise has not a redeeming feature, and hastily I add that during the day prior to my viewing it nothing had occurred to place me in a critical mood. As a matter of fact, those preceding hours had been exceptionally good to me, and I was primed to be entertained by almost anything.

AT no time during the unreeling of this Warner masterpiece of inadequacy did I feel I was witnessing actuality—and so, to me, the production is utterly devoid of the quality which all photoplays should attain. Of course I refer to the illusion of reality. *My Man Godfrey* comes to mind. While seeing that picture, I was treated to the subconscious belief that each moment of it was an actual happening; its most far-fetched situations bore the stamp of realism. Not until analyzing it after I had left the theatre did I think of its illogicalities. The *Wedding* story is no more unbelievable than that of Universal's success, and given the sort of treatment it loudly cries for, this Burbank brainchild would have been a quite good little picture.

What to me seems unsatisfactory direction not infrequently is evident, Nick Grinde's work leaving much to be desired. Guilty of over-emphasis quite often, he presents a good deal of the comedy with old-time stage technique, the playing of many scenes leading to the belief that prior to calling for action he has instructed his actors to "take it big," to stress points which ought not to have been stressed. I think Grinde should have skipped very lightly over the comedy situations contained in the script. But then what does my opinion mean when a

large audience vigorously approved? At any rate, the director has permitted his players with frequency to perform most unnaturally, when by letting them act as human beings he could have given us a much better picture.

IN numerous places directorial conventionalities have crept in. Timing is uneven, some of the scenes in proper tempo, some without called-for swiftness. Sadly lacking unity, the picture discloses a wealth of timeworn, weak, senseless gags. A purely unreal article is the romance between Jane Wyman and William Hopper. One feels they fall in love, quarrel, fall out of love and then in again merely because the script has called for their doing so. It is all very unconvincing.

Following is an example of the brilliant and unique humor found in the Roy Chanslor-Houston Branch script: After a quarrel with the girl, the boy rushes into a bedroom, brings forth a traveling bag, takes some shirts from a bureau drawer and puts them into the bag. Enters she and, behind his back, unknown to him, returns the shirts to the bureau drawer while he is placing another stack of them in the suitcase. Again he takes the first stack and puts it into the bag. Again she returns shirts to bureau. Again and again he packs the same ones—and isn't aware of it. The audience apparently relished this feeble situation, which initially was introduced long before the arrival of sound-cinema. Why is it still used? Ask the producer that he'll tell you, "It makes them laugh." Good enough reason, I suppose.

There is not a single portrayal which I am able to commend.

I do not suggest that you miss this picture, for your sense of humor may be of the sort displayed by the majority of the preview spectators.

### Roach Offers a Musical

**PICK A STAR**, Metro release of an Edward Sedgwick production for Hal Roach. Directed by Edward Sedgwick; original story and screen play, Richard Flournoy, Author, Vernon Jones and Thomas J. Dugan; photography, Norbert Brodine; film editor, William Terhune; sound, William Randall; art direction, Arthur I. Royce; set decorations, W. L. Stevens; gowns, Ernest Schrap; photographic effects, Roy Seawright; musical direction, Arthur Morton and Marvin Hatley; dances staged by Edward Court; music and lyrics, Fred Stryker and Johnny Lange; *Pick A Star* music and lyrics, R. Alex. Anderson. Cast: Patsy Kelly, Jack Haley, Rosina Lawrence, Mischa Auer, Lyda Roberti, Charles Halton, Tom Dugan, Russell Hicks, Cully Richards, Spencer Charters, Sam Adams, Robert Gleckler, Joyce Compton, Johnny Arthur, James Finlayson, Walter Long, Wesley Barry, Johnny Hyams, Leila McIntyre, Benny Burt, Laurel and Hardy. Running time, 78 minutes.

HAL ROACH has far from stinted the production of this. His newest feature-length offering, which monetarily and in time and effort appears to have consumed more than any of his previous undertakings. The result—from the standpoint of entertainment—is short of being justifiable. *Pick a Star* however, seems almost certain to prove itself a commercially satisfactory enterprise, mainly because it presents such popular performers as Laurel and Hardy, Patsy Kelly, Jack Haley, Misha Auer and Lyda Roberti, and because much of its narrative is set in an atmosphere of wide appeal.

It is unfortunate that Roach was not able to acquire better story material for a picture produced on so lavish a scale—unfortunate that he resorted to employment of a plot that is too much of a formula affair and too devoid of strength to enlist our interest. As compensation for the thematic deficiency, an abundance of comedy situations have been interpolated, the majority of them decidedly unamusing, too forced in their interpretation and too obviously thrust in as padding. Some, on the other hand, cannot be called unsuccessful. A Laurel and Hardy sequence treats us to moments of notably scintillating humor. It is an interlude climaxed when a tiny harmoinca fortuitously journeys into Hardy, permitting Laurel to offer a tune by employing hand pressure against his partners stomach, wherein is the mouth organ.

**P**RESENTING a satirical depiction of Hollywood from the cinematic angle, *Pick a Star* is creditable with occasionally providing breezy diversion and impressiveness. It is chargeable with dragging in many places, a fault that in some of the instances can be remedied by the editing department. And so I presume that when the picture is released these parts will have gained the briskness which was lacking at the preview. Draggingness of several scenes is due to the hackneyed, unsubstantial, saddening brand of humor owned by them and is incurable in a cutting room, this comedy being blended so intimately with plot significance that one cannot be removed without the other.

*Pick a Star* unfolds the trivial tale wherein the small-town girl and boy, in the city to make good, drift apart when she learns he isn't the success he has claimed to be and then, with the realization of ambition, are reunited happily. These characters are portrayed satisfactorily by Jack Haley and Rosina Lawrence, and, of course, there is the "other man," which Mischa Auer vigorously hams to the audience's delight. Of all the players, Laurel and Hardy are the most efficient, their two specialty numbers being performed superbly. Patsy Kelly is too loud and forced to win my approval.

Edward Sedgwick, a Hollywood veteran with many notable films to his credit, directed *Pick a Star*, throughout which there are scenes that display true directorial skill. Filming this story was by no means a simple task, and I can think of many other equally experienced men under whose guidance the outcome would not have been acceptable. There are certain minor things which Sedgwick should not have allowed to appear, such as the old, old and unfunny gag of someone rushing into a closet and thinking it the exit that is in the opposite wall.

CLAUDINE WEST

*Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer*

This situation outgrew its usefulness, which never was much, years ago. But perhaps the director was not permitted to shoot the picture without the inclusion of this and other incidents of its caliber. Norbert Brodines's photography at times attains outstanding excellence.

### Good One from Golden

**BIG BUSINESS**, 20th Century-Fox. Directed by Frank R. Strayer; associate producer, Max Golden; screen play by Robert Ellis and Helen Logan; original story by Ron Ferguson and Eleanor De Lamater; based on the characters created by Katharine Kavanaugh; photography, Edward Snyder; art direction, Chester Gore; assistant director, William Eckhardt; film editor, Al De Gaetano; costumes, Herschel; sound, S. C. Chapman and Harry M. Leonard; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Jed Prouty, Shirley Deane, Spring Byington, Russell Gleason, Kenneth Howell, Allan Lane, George Ernest, June Carlson, Florence Roberts, Billy Mahan, Marjorie Weaver, Frank Conroy, Wallis Clark.

**S**AVE perhaps for the initial one of the series, this is the most enjoyable of the Jones Family offerings. Under the intelligent production guidance of Max Golden, it reveals a pleasantly familiar plot, wrought into an excellent script, and, what is of greatest importance, it brings back to the Jones household the humanness and naturalness which was lost after Century first introduced the family to us. Again the Joneses do believable things in a believable manner.

In *Off to the Races*, produced just before *Big Business*, the characters failed to behave themselves properly; they shouted almost violently and quite frequently acted like a collection of Sennett comics. But now, I happily report, Century seems to realize its error in permitting them to indulge in such things. It is hoped that they will continue to bring to life normal incidents occurring in an ordinary American family, that not again will they be presented in the farcical fashion which *Races* gave them to us.

Handsomely produced, *Big Business* has a heart-warming domestic spirit which will gain for it success with any type of audience. It has fine direction, credited to Frank Strayer, excellent camera work by Edward Snyder, and some very good portrayals, the most notable of them given by Russel Gleason, young George Ernst and Kenneth Howell. Spring Byington and Jed Prouty, like the remainder of the cast, are flawless in their roles.

Heartily I recommend *Big Business*.

M I L O A N D E R S O N  
C O S T U M E D E S I G N E R

for the

P R I N C E A N D T H E P A U P E R

A Warner Brothers

Production

# Camera Technique and Dialogue

(The fifth in a series of special articles by the Editor dealing with the theory and practice of motion picture production.)

**O**UR technical approach to the making of a motion picture must have regard for the laws of screen art and the business of the film industry. Business considerations enter into the selection of story material. For instance, no producer would be unwise enough to make a picture extolling the Democratic party at the expense of Republicans. Such a theme would be controversial and a propaganda film cannot please adherents of both sides of a disputed theory. The Democratic party could produce such a film and in its making obey every law of screen art, but still it would be a propaganda film and not a strictly commercial venture. We are discussing motion pictures as articles of commerce and are endeavoring to determine the extent to which they can be made to accord with the laws of screen art without jeopardizing their commercial prospects at their source or at their outlet. They must be made at a minimum of cost and must provide a maximum of entertainment.

It is not his loyalty to his art which prompts an artist to obey its laws. All his concern is for his creations. No art was created by rules and precepts. In every art the creation came first, and gradually the artist became aware of certain fundamental principles which applied to all of them. Later artists profited by the discoveries of the pioneers, learned the principles at the outset of their careers and used them, not to express the principles, but to express themselves. Pioneers in motion picture art have developed principles which now compose the basic laws governing all its creations from a one-reel extravagant comedy to a multiple-reel *The Good Earth*. Our quest now is for a formula which will constitute a practical union of the demands of screen art and the dictates of the screen business.

**S**TRANGELY enough, the gradual development of the American cinema toward perfection was checked by the perfection of a motion picture sent to us from abroad. In 1925 *The Last Laugh* was made in Germany, Emil Jannings its star. It was the first of the less than half-dozen perfect pictures the screen has to its credit. It contained no printed titles, the entire story being told by the camera. It was gripping drama, an engrossing demonstration of the power of purely visual entertainment. When shown in this country, however, it performed poorly at the box-office. The theme of the story was an hotel doorman's reverence for his uniform, a theme somewhat foreign to American psychology. And Jannings' name was unknown here, consequently, despite its outstanding artistic merits, *The Last Laugh* proved to be commercially disappointing to those who sponsored it in this country. Our public had not been educated up to it.

A year or two after the German picture disappeared from American screens, the head of one of our biggest

production organizations asked me to view a picture and tell him if I thought any changes in it would be advisable. My subsequent report was entirely favorable to the production. But there was one thing about it, I told the producer, which I could not understand. It was sprinkled generously with printed titles, but I could not see that even one of them was necessary, my opinion being that it would be much better entertainment if every title were eliminated.

"As a matter of fact," said the producer, "When I first saw it there were no titles in it. I had a title writer add them. I did not want to have another *Last Laugh* on my hands. The German picture, you know, failed in this country because it contained no titles."

**W**HEN the strength of a creation is held to be a weakness by one in a position to control it, we can but wonder at the artistic progress screen entertainment has made. Still blocking its progress are a hundred inhibitions founded on as great ignorance as that displayed by the producer I quote, one who for years has been controlling the expenditure of scores of millions of dollars in the making of pictures, employing many scores of people who know how they should be made, but who are not permitted to express their knowledge on the screen. So, as we pursue our efforts to decide upon a formula for the perfect picture, we must agree upon a picture we should like to see even though we have no hopes of seeing it as long as Hollywood production is dominated by the present producers.

We postulate at the outset that pure screen entertainment is visual, therefore only when we are compelled to do so for considerations of length of film and cost of production, should we sacrifice visual quality to the spoken word. In other words, the camera must be permitted to tell as much of the story as it can within the restrictions put upon it by the material aspects of production. A picture must come within a prescribed length; its place on a theatre's program must be considered. Occasionally we have a great production (*The Great Ziegfeld*, *The Good Earth*) of such magnitude as to disregard time and in itself constitute a program, but it is not another such production we are considering now. We are thinking in terms of the run-of-the-mill product upon which the welfare of the film industry rests more than it does upon the occasional epic.

**O**NE all-important reason why we should preserve as much as possible of the visual quality is the ability it gives us to crowd more entertainment into a given length of film than it can contain if the picture consists of actors photographed while relating the story in dialogue. The whole story of two-and-a-half-hour play can be told in an hour and a quarter of pure cinema. Writes Pudovkin: "The human eye is capable of preceiving, easily and immediately, the content of a succession of visual shots, whereas. . .



the ear cannot with the same immediacy detect the significance of alterations in sound." The Russian cinema genius refers here to staccato cutting, rapid visual movement from one story fragment to another. As we can adjust our senses more readily from one visual image to another than from one dialogue scene to another, or from any sound scene to another in which sound bears part of the burden of telling the story, it follows that in a given time purely visual images can tell us more story than can be told in sound shots which must be projected more slowly to enable the audience to get their significance.

As a general rule in business, the commodity which gives most for the money is the commodity the public buys most readily. It would appear, then, that to give the public the most for the money it spends for screen entertainment, the film industry must give it as much story as possible. More story can be told by the camera than by the microphone. The implication is obvious—the first law of the talkie is: Never relate in dialogue any story point which can be conveyed to the audience in pictures.

**B**ANISHMENT of dialogue from the screen is not demanded by rule, reason or box-office. It always has been a prominent and valuable element of screen creations. We cannot expect the hero to remain mute and endeavor to convey to us, by the expression of a voiceless face, the depth of his hatred for the villain. It really is the *photograph of the dialogue* which gives the scene its place in the story. The facial expression which the camera brings to us is created by the player's absorption in the lines he is reading, his gestures his unconscious physical reaction to the import of his words. All the story values of the scene, therefore, are registered by the camera; we see them. Then why should we *hear* them? What difference does it make how he words his imprecations?

Why should we hear Boy's speech when he declares his love for Girl? Why must we hear a mother's words when she tucks her baby in bed? A woman's "Turn to the right at the next corner, James," when in a moment we see the car turn to the right? "Give me a match," when we see a hand go into a pocket and bring forth a match? "I can't find my glasses. Oh, here they are," when the action of the speaker is as illuminative as the words? "I have an appointment with John Brown," when in a moment we see the speaker ushered into the presence of a man already identified in the picture as John Brown? And so on, *ad infinitum*—all gratuitous and unnecessary disturbances of the serenity of what is fundamentally a visual art.

**B**UT how can we treat dialogue in a manner to permit us to follow it visually instead of aurally? If we see lips moving on the screen, does it not follow that there will be something missing, some lessening in the strength of the suggestion of reality, if we do not hear what the lips are saying?

Before working our way past these questions, we have to fit music into its proper place in screen entertainment. We must not have a totally silent screen. There are psy-

chological and physiological considerations which forbid it. When in real life we see a man walking down an uncarpeted corridor, we expect to hear the sound of his footsteps. If we hear nothing, if his well shod shoes fall on the floor silently, if no noise whatever were caused by his movements, we would experience nervous reaction to the scene; our unfulfilled expectancy of sound would create an eerie effect, would be a strain on our nerves.

In another scene, if at the end of the same corridor a man were standing, his back to us, his attitude suggesting he was making no noise; if a mischievous boy rolled toward the man a large ball we knew would explode with a bang when it reached him, the very silence of the scene would be its strength. Our interest then would be in the persistence of the period of absolute silence until the moment of impact of the ball on the man's legs; a period during which our suspense would increase as the ball neared the silent man. Our interest would be kept alive by our expectancy of a climax; the preservation of silence would give the climax its value.

**O**UR first scene would be accompanied by the expectancy of sound. We have to hear something to relieve the nervous tension. *But we do not have to hear the footsteps.* The sound of footsteps is real, and reality is an anachronism in the creation of an art of the *illusion* of reality. It is not a man who is walking; it is a shadow, and shadows are silent. But our imaginations make the shadow a real man. If the unity of the creation is to be maintained, if the mood of the scene is to be preserved and our absorption in what we are viewing is not to be disturbed, then all the elements which make the scene complete must be the product of our imagination; so, are our imagination makes us see a man, it can make us hear the footsteps, and there we have pure cinema.

But the absence of all sound from the screen would cause nervous tension to interfere with the full play of the imagination in accepting as natural the lack of sound as the man's shoes had contact with the hard floor in an otherwise empty corridor. Our aural sense must be given something to feed on if our imaginative faculty is to have full rein; a diet of something the nervous system can assimilate easily, unconsciously, without disturbance to any other sense.

**M**USIC is the art most closely allied to screen art. The perfect motion picture is a symphony of the movement of visual images, just as an orchestrated symphony is one of movement of tonal images. Everything screen art lacks to make it complete is supplied by musical accompaniment. Music makes our mood receptive to what the screen offers. When our attention is fixed on an absolutely silent screen and no music is provided from another source, only our visual sense is functioning in absorbing the drama being enacted before our eyes. It is a physiological fact that when one sense is being occupied to the exclusion of all others, it tires more readily than when another sense is occupied in sympathy with it.

We have five senses. Obviously the sound screen cannot provide us with anything to smell, taste or feel, con-

sequently it has only the sense of hearing left to engage in sympathy with the functioning of the sense of vision. And music must be its choice. It has no other.

But it does not require the aid of music in telling its stories. It can attend to that end of it itself, but it needs something to induce in the audience the utmost possible receptivity to what is offered, something to absorb elements which otherwise would become distractions to interfere with the continuity of the audience's interest in what the screen was showing in its procession of pictorial images. Only music will serve the purpose.

Music should be continuous background for a motion picture, and the first step in the evolution of the present talkie into a motion picture will be taken when it has been provided with a complete score. Under no circumstance should the music stop for sound, whether mechanically produced or by the reading of lines. **It can stop** for a brief moment for the purpose of silence.

Take the second scene I have outlined above—the man unconscious of the ball rolling silently toward him, our expectancy of an amusing scene when the ball reaches him and explodes. Silence is essential to the success of the prank; the sudden suspension of the music intensifies the silence: we hold our breath—the ball explodes, the music resumes, the suspense ends, and the film proceeds on its normal way. Make the scene tragic—a hand, clutching a revolver, slowly appearing between parting curtains; an unsuspecting man, his back to it, the gun pointing at him, the sudden complete silence intensified by the abrupt pause in the musical accompaniment. It is the score which gives the scene its full dramatic intensity, for, if we did not have it, there could be no abrupt cessation to establish the contrast between sound and silence and thereby heighten the drama of the moment.

**T**HUS we have music as an element to meet the esthetic demands of screen art. Now let us see if it plays a part in solving the problem suggested by the question we asked before we branched off on our discussion of music: How can we treat dialogue in a manner to permit us to follow it visually instead of aurally? When we see lips moving on the screen we must hear something, but *we do not have to hear what the lips are saying*.

We are considering here the standard motion picture, not a psychological problem play whose theme must be developed in dialogue for our intellectual digestion. Later we will discuss such an offering and fit it into its proper place in the cinematic program; but at present our concern is for the more elemental screen drama, and our quest is for a device to make it unnecessary for us to *hear* all the dialogue we *see* on the screen.

When two men are quarreling in a screen drama, the scene derives all its value from the *fact* of the quarrel, not from its physical manifestation or its verbal accompaniment. But first we must know the cause of the quarrel. If previous action did not make it logical, or if we are seeing the two men for the first time, obviously some explanation is necessary. It might be possible to establish the reason pictorially, but we must keep the story moving and time is saved by injecting a line of

dialogue spoken by A who comes with menacing attitude into B's office, leans over B's desk, and asks, "Why did you start that scurrilous gossip about my wife?" Now we know the meaning of the sly remarks exchanged by women on the golf club terrace in a previous scene. But what is A going to do about it, now that we are aware why he is in the office? The whole office scene, therefore, has value only as an answer to our question.

We heard the question asked by A. We had to hear it. But what else is said is of no importance to us, has no story value. We wish to *see* the rest of it, to watch the blows struck, to await the termination of the fight in order to learn what happens next, what effect the altercation has on the affairs of the people in whom the story has made us interested. But how can we follow the progress of the quarrel and at the same time not hear the imprecations hurled back and forth before the fight begins? How can all the scene, excepting the one line we heard, be presented visually?

**A**S question about the gossip of which his wife is the victim, does not get its full meaning solely from the words he uses. He might ask the question pleasantly, amusedly, jokingly. Only by looking into his eyes do we become aware of the intense anger boiling within him, and only by hearing his voice can we gauge the extent of the emotion of anger which controls him. In a silent picture the speech would have appeared on the screen as a spoken title, and a close-up of his features would have given it emphasis. In a talkie a close-up is necessary to achieve the same result.

A fundamental fact to be taken into consideration in our development of the formula for the perfect motion picture containing audible dialogue, is that the camera is the eye of the audience. Irrespective of the size of a film theatre or the arrangement of the seats, each member of an audience viewing a picture is theoretically as close to the players in a scene as the camera was when they were photographed. The main strength of the screen as a medium of entertainment is its ability to make the audience, so to speak, move into each successive scene or stay at a distance.

Manifestly, when we must see the expression of emotion in a player's eyes to get the full value of a scene, the camera must move us close enough to the player to enable us to do so, consequently A must be shown in a close-up shot as he asks B the question. Only by such camera treatment can all the menace in his speech become apparent to us. As we now are standing close enough to A to hear him even if he speaks in a tone so low only B can hear him, we also must hear him, as the close-up brings us nearer the speaker than B is, the width of the desk not being between A and us as it is between A and B.

**O**UR obsession for the purity of screen art cannot be carried to the point of our objecting to the inclusion of audible dialogue when we are so close to a character we cannot avoid hearing anything he says. We must know what A says if we are to understand the reason for the

quarrel, therefore making the speech audible to us is a legitimate use of the microphone, as in the silent era the resort to a printed title was a legitimate device to achieve the same end. But when we hear Smith's secretary tell him Mr. Jones is on the phone, hear him say to Jones, "All right, I'll be right over;" hear his "I'm going to Mr. Jones's office," to his secretary; "The Jones Building," to the taxi driver; "I have an appointment with Mr. Jones," to the latter's secretary: "Mr. Jones, Mr. Smith is here," from the secretary to Jones; "Go right in Mr. Smith, Mr. Jones is expecting you," from the secretary to Smith: "Good morning, Jones," by Smith; "Good morning Smith" by Jones, "Have a smoke? Nice morning, isn't it?" "It certainly is," by Smith, "No thanks; just finished my pipe; always smoke a pipe first thing in the morning"—when we hear such chatter, as we do in practically all talkies, our ears are being assailed by sound utterly devoid of even a suggestion of story value to justify its intrusion.

There is no drama in any of the speeches, no illuminating facial expression accompanying their delivery, no demand for close-ups to bring us so near the speakers we must hear what they say. We see all the essential story value, we see Smith hang up his phone, get his hat, address his secretary, instruct the taxi driver, address Jones's secretary and enter an office by a door upon which we see, "Mr. Jones. Private." But we must hear something.

**H**ERE the musical score keeps the picture on the cinematic course. Subconsciously and without disturbing our absorption in what we see, we hear the music. And at the same time we see the characters making the conventional remarks which naturally would be consistent with their movements, but the lack of reason for close-ups keeps us so far from the speakers we do not expect to hear their words. The music, and the absence of expectancy unfulfilled, combine to satisfy our senses and divert none of our attention from the thread of the story we are following with our eyes. *Remedying the evil of too much dialogue is merely a matter of developing intelligent camera technique.*

Even from the talkiest of the all-talkie pictures appearing on the screens of the world, at least one-half of the dialogue could be eliminated by intelligent script writing and equally intelligent direction. The audience does not expect to hear words every time it sees a player's lips moving. Its only desire is for what appeals to its reason. If it is close enough to a player to see he is speaking casually, but far enough from him to make it reasonable it would not hear words uttered obviously so quietly, there would be no feeling of thwarted expectancy, no let-down in its interest in the drama. And further reduction in the amount of dialogue would be made by scenarists if they prepared their scripts for visual presentation, not oral, if they wrote motion pictures, not talkies.

But the talkie has a place in screen entertainment. We will make that the subject of our next discussion.

They say on the Metro lot that his performance in *Parnell* is going to show us a new Clark Gable.

# SLAVKO VORKAPICH

*Writing and Directing  
Montage Effects*

For Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

*Current Release*

Maytime

COMMENCING APRIL 26

8:30 P. M. NIGHTLY—FOR LIMITED ENGAGEMENT

ALLAN  
**Hersholt**

WILL APPEAR WITH THE EDW. CLARK PLAYERS

— IN —

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# S P E C T A T O R

Twelfth Year

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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Number 5

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I MET HIM IN PARIS ★ YOU CAN'T BEAT LOVE ★ LET THEM LIVE  
THERE GOES MY GIRL ★ MEET THE MISSUS ★ THE LADY ESCAPES

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A MOTION PICTURE PUBLICATION WRITTEN SOLELY FOR MOTION PICTURE MINDS

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# **MICHAEL CURTIZ**

**Directed**

**“KID GALAHAD”**

**for**

**Warner Brothers**

**Current  
Production**

**“Perfect Specimen”**



From the

# Editor's Easy Chair

**R**ED KANN, in *Motion Picture Daily*, quotes Dave Selznick in this wise observation: "The practice of using the same personality as many as five or six times a year is very apt to ruin that personality." Anyone with screen personality and ability to express it is capable of maintaining an even level of box-office strength for as long as he or she remains in pictures, yet there are only a few players who under present production methods are able to hold their popularity with the public. They are the ones who appear in but two or three pictures a year. It is Garbo's rare appearances which make her so valuable to Metro by virtue of being one of the few known box-office assets, yet if she were willing, Metro undoubtedly would keep her grinding out one picture after another until she had little box-office value left. If it were Metro's determination to kill off Bob Taylor as rapidly as possible, it could not go at it more efficiently than it is doing now in constantly keeping him before the public. Conservation of resources, not their dissipation for quick profits, is one of the elemental rules of business, yet it is a rule of which motion picture producers remain in ignorance. The harm is not done by the mere fact of showing a popular player too often. It goes deeper than that. It has the effect of reducing the popularity of all those who appear on the screen with the too frequently exploited star.

**W**HILE he is not a box-office star of the first rank, Victor Moore will serve as an illustration to support the view that it is bad business to make the screen appearance of a player too frequent. While Victor's performances in Leo McCarey's *Make Way for Tomorrow* was still fresh in my mind, I saw him in *Meet the Missus*, another in the series of little domestic comedies RKO is making with him and Helen Broderick. I had been amused by the other comedies, but the latest I did not enjoy because Moore still was to me the patient husband in the McCarey picture. Before presenting him in such a light comedy, Radio should have given the public an opportunity to forget his last characterization. So it is with the big stars who have not the sense of Garbo, Ronnie Colman and a few others who refuse to accept every role offered. The recent Coronation in London was the greatest show of the century, not only on its own account, but because a quarter of a century had elapsed since the last show of the same sort was presented. It was a rare event. The same principle should be applied

to the screen appearances of the big stars. Their pictures should come infrequently enough to make each of them an event of first importance. A new Garbo picture is an outstanding screen event. The same thing should be true of a score or more of the leading box-office players if their box-office ratings are to be maintained.

**S**OMETHING else producers should learn is that it is not good business to put the same stars in the same stories more than two or three times at the most. The Astaire-Rogers team has been high on the list of box-office names since its first appearance. Its current picture *Shall We Dance?* (Question mark by courtesy of the SPECTATOR as RKO executives ruled it was superfluous) is not doing so well at the box-office, as its story is the same as those preceding it, only the locale being different. If the RKO people were as nimble from the neck up as Fred Astaire is from the hips down, they would see to it that the great dancer with the box-office personality was provided with both a new story and a new partner. Always Fred is presented as a dancer, just as Grace Moore is as an opera singer, with the result that we expect the former to dance superbly and the latter to sing divinely. The great Astaire story, if such a one ever is written, will not make him a professional dancer; he will be just an ordinary young man who will dance now and then for the pure love of dancing and without putting the people in the picture with him into a state of goggle-eyed ecstasy. The audiences should be permitted to discover for themselves the merit in a screen presentation; it should not be forced on them by exploitation in the picture. Hollywood presents grand opera singers as such in stories which exalt them as vocalists even though no grand opera ever presented one of its characters as a singer.

\* \* \*

**Q**UOTING Phil Scheuer who writes so gracefully, so entertainingly and so wisely for the *Los Angeles Times*: "There is nothing mystical about writing for the films, but neither is there any short cut to the inner circle. The producers cannot, or will not, take a chance with even a hypothetically good writer. Let him first use the printed page or the dramatic stage as a showcase for his wares, they argue; then they will seek *him* out. It is their way of cinching a sure thing, the only way they know." Unquoting Phil. Motion picture producers are

great men. Ask any one of them and he will admit it. The only trouble is that their greatness is not recognized outside Hollywood; their business methods are not applied to other industries. If they were, industry would be revolutionized. People ambitious to erect business buildings would learn how by building bridges; tailors would serve their apprenticeship at making tents, and automobile engineers would learn about passenger cars by studying snowplows. The amusement the intelligent public derives from its contemplation of the vagaries of picture producers is quite understandable. They appeal to anyone's sense of humor. If the film barons suddenly were endowed with real picture intelligence the first thing they would do would be to take steps to establish their own source of story material. They would serve notice on authors and playwrights that after a specified date they would buy nothing but motion pictures on paper. "But," the producer will protest, "how are they going to learn to write in terms of the screen?" What business is that of Hollywood? How did Fannie Hurst learn how to write books? Who taught Bob Sherwood to write plays? A person can learn more about screen writing by viewing pictures in Oshkosh than he can by listening to prattle about it in a Hollywood studio. It is not up to Hollywood to train writers, just as it is not up to a group of prospective patients to undertake the expense of a student's course in medicine. Screen writing is the simplest form of story construction. The hardest part of the novelist's or playwright's work is that which in a scenario is left to the camera for expression on the screen, thus it is easier to write for pictures than for book publishers or play producers.

\* \* \*

**S**ID SOLOSKY is quoted in theatre advertisements as having written "*Captains Courageous* is the kind of picture which makes movie fans of movie critics." Only movie fans are qualified to become movie critics.

\* \* \*

**T**HE free publicity Sam Goldwyn is getting will bring him closer to that position all producers should strive to attain—the establishment of their names as box-office assets. When the public seeks a Goldwyn production because Goldwyn produced it and not because of the players appearing in it, Sam can select players to suit the parts and no longer will need to make over the part to suit the personalities of players with box-office names. If MGM, as an example, had expended in building its own name, one-tenth as much thought and money as it has expended in building the names of its stars, its business security would be on a more secure basis than it can be as long as it depends on the stability of the public's liking for a group of individuals. Nothing else producers have done can match in foolishness their exploitation of stars at the neglect of their own names.

**T**IME magazine's review of *Make Way for Tomorrow* opens with these remarks: "*Make Way for Tomorrow* (Paramount). The fact that a good story simply told is worth more than all the box-office names, production numbers and expensive sets in Hollywood is one of those plain truths which the cinema industry finds hardest to

assimilate. Consequently, if *Make Way for Tomorrow* makes a fortune for its producers, Hollywood can be expected to exhibit amazement." *Time* adds that "no amazement is in order" and gives as the reason the excellence of Leo McCarey's picture dealing with the financial insecurity of old age. However, amazement will be in order, but not for any reason *Time* seems to be aware of. Since the microphone made its appearance in film studios no finer example of the talkie form has been given the public than Paramount presents in *Make Way for Tomorrow*. But the public has not been trained to buy merit, nor does Paramount's trademark necessarily imply merit. And "Adolph Zukor Presents" has no commercial value. The only names which have box-office lure are those of about two score players whose names producing organizations have exploited at the expense of their own. None of these names appears in the cast of the McCarey picture, therefore if it "makes a fortune for its producers," there will be, indeed, cause for amazement. However, it is amazing that the film industry always has pursued the policy of selling personalities instead of pictures. In the case of *Make Way for Tomorrow* it will cost Paramount the great difference between what its merits entitle it to and what it will bring in.

\* \* \*

**T**HE best news we have had in a long, long time is that Ruby Keeler is to play opposite Fred Astaire. Pictures with two such engaging personalities and rare dancing grace and agility will make box-office sing merry tunes.

\* \* \*

**O**N one of his recent broadcasts Jimmie Fiddler discoursed wisely on Century's frantic efforts to put Shirley Temple in as many pictures as possible before the appeal of her childish bloom wears off, with its attendant lessening of her box-office value. Jimmie demonstrated mathematically that Shirley could go on indefinitely, proving his point by citing Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland, two youngsters now successful on the screen at ages Shirley inevitably will reach as she continues her progress towards matured womanhood. He could have strengthened his argument by proceeding from objective to subjective reasoning. The tenure of Shirley's screen popularity will not be determined by the calendar. It is a matter which rests entirely with her producers. What she has to sell the public is personality, which is ageless; and ability to express it engagingly, which she has now and which can be developed more fully with her advancing years. But to hold her popularity she must be presented in stronger stories than those in which we have seen her during the past year. And rushing her from one production to another is not a wise policy. Century apparently has been regarding her merely as a child with cute ways which would entertain us only while she is a child. Apparently it never grasped the fact that in Shirley it has perhaps the greatest actress ever to appear in pictures, one whose screen appearances should be made more important by becoming more rare. Put her in two productions a year, with stories big enough to match her natural talents, and little Shirley can



go on forever. Her career is in the hands of her producers. If her box-office strength dwindles it will be their fault. So far she has continued to stand up under the treatment accorded her, but that cannot go on forever.

\* \* \*

**R**ECENTLY a producer told me he was doing his best to reduce the amount of dialogue in all his pictures, that he had one highly paid writer who spent practically all his time going over scripts and eliminating speeches. That sort of dialogue treatment does more harm than good. No effort ever should be made to eliminate talk. If the scenarist's approach to his task of preparing a story for shooting is from the standpoint of the camera, there will not be too much dialogue in the completed script. The trouble with pictures now—the trouble which is sending producers on a frantic search for new faces, for vaudeville acts, for anything they can find to stimulate the box-office—is that all our screen writers are thinking in terms of the stage and are telling their stories in speeches we must hear instead of putting them in scenes which would express them visually. The film industry always has been incomprehensible, but the most incomprehensible thing about it now is its failure to realize the harm being done by too much talk and the complete simplicity of the manner in which the remedy can be applied.

\* \* \*

**W**HEN viewing *Swing High, Swing Low* I was impressed by a bit done by an actor I did not know and whose name consequently was not mentioned in my review. A cellophane-wrapped package was delivered to me a few days ago and after considerable effort I got through the cellophane and came across a little wire-stitched portfolio of photographs of a character actor in make-up for a score or more parts he had played. Among them I found the person who had done the *Swing High* bit. He is Charlie Arnt. Because I admired his work, but more because I am willing to play the game and give him the publicity he hoped for when he sent me his publicity stuff, I hereby declare to all and sundry persons that I think Charlie is a clever fellow.

\* \* \*

**A**T last Hollywood is to have something it should have had a long time ago—an organization which will bring to it for entertainment and study the best foreign pictures as they are made, and will make available for another viewing the best foreign and domestic productions of former years. Thanks to the enterprise and energy of Donald Gledhill, executive secretary of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Southern California Film Society is coming into being with a sponsoring committee of imposing names. It always has been strange to me that Hollywood has done nothing in the way of providing those in pictures, and those ambitious to get into them, with an opportunity to learn something about the fundamentals of the screen both as an art and as a business. I could name a score of American cities in which the screen is studied more seriously than it is here. The film society is late in coming, but

is none the less welcome on that account. It easily can develop into a strong body which will play a big part in the progress of the screen. In addition to bringing pictures to us, it no doubt will provide means for discussions of screen topics. Everyone with a desire to increase his or her screen knowledge should join the society promptly to permit it to get under way as soon as possible. For myself, I do not want to be forced to make the journey to downtown Los Angeles to see a foreign picture I should be able to see in Hollywood.

\* \* \*

**N**ORMAN WEBB'S *National Box-Office Digest*, the form chart of picture production which reveals in accurate percentages how productions are performing, is increasing its usefulness by becoming a weekly. The *Digest* and the SPECTATOR supplement one another: Norman tells you how the box-office is performing and we tell you why.

\* \* \*

**D**ICK FORAN, so we are told, is considered by Warner Brothers to be a too valuable box-office asset to be subjected to the risk incurred in playing in Western pictures, so he is to discard his chaps, put on store clothes and tight collars and be a big, red-headed sissy who makes love to girls and faces no physical danger greater than tripping over a triangular sandwich at an afternoon tea. Rather than assuring his safety by taking him out of Westerns, I would like to see him in Westerns which were made safe for him. Fundamentally, Westerns have the strongest entertainment values pictures can have. They appeal to all ages and all mentalities; they are both realistic and idealistic, the most elementally honest, and have pictorial possibilities not available to the other classes of screen entertainment. They do not get into the biggest houses only because they are deliberately aimed at only the smaller houses, because they are held in low esteem by the studios and are made under protest because the boys and girls of the country insist upon having them. If nearly all the leading theatres were not controlled by producers so lacking in knowledge of audience psychology, a producing company which made only big Westerns soon would become a big money maker. Then, instead of considering Dick Foran too good for Westerns, the question would be if he were good enough to be in them. And he would be, no matter how good Westerns became. His ingratiating personality, his looks and his ability make him a good box-office bet in any kind of picture. If his chaps disappear permanently, we must seek whatever solace we can find in the fact that he also can wear dress clothes as if they belonged to him.

\* \* \*

**A**LTHOUGH those with meaner dispositions no doubt enjoyed his discomfiture, the majority of his fellow producers must have had a feeling of deep sympathy for Pan Berman when his efforts to secure a stage actress for one of his pictures failed and he was forced to consider a motion picture actress for a motion picture part. RKO had purchased a stage play, *Having a Wonderful Time*, and there being no motion picture actresses in Hollywood,

Pan sought Katherine Locke, who had the leading role in New York, to play the same role in the picture. But Ben Schulberg, the big meanie, has Katherine under contract and would not lend her to Pan, so the RKO producer had to turn to Mitzi Green, notwithstanding the fact that as a youngster she had had long training in pictures. Things have come to a sad pass when motion picture producers are compelled to cast motion picture actresses in leading parts. Pan has our deepest sympathy.

\* \* \*

**H**ARRY COHN made a wise move when he engaged Frances Marion to produce pictures for Columbia. Miss Marion has a keen sense of screen values and for a longer period than any other writer has maintained a high level of excellence in the many scripts she has written. She has an imposing list of notable successes to her credit, and no doubt would have still more to her credit if her stories had been screened as she wrote them. Now she is in a position to see that her ideas reach the screen, which makes it safe for us to anticipate cinematic treats when we view the pictures she will produce. All associate producers should be recruited from the ranks of screen writers. A motion picture is a photographed story, and its author is the logical one to see that it is photographed properly.

\* \* \*

**S**OME day some producer is going to develop sufficient intelligence to take advantage of Sterling Holloway's unique personality and acting ability, and make him the box-office attraction he easily could become. The same goes for Buddy Ebsen. The screen needs a few such personalities as these young fellows possess.

\* \* \*

**A**N innovation in the presentation of casts on the screen is made by *Night Must Fall*, which gives the names of the players in the order of their appearances. The difficulty, of course, lies in remembering the names, but at least the first few to appear are identified by name. I see many pictures and am acquainted with many faces, but in nearly every picture I review there are players whose work entitles them to individual mention but whose real names or character names I cannot identify on the credit list the studio provides. Some pictures show the more important players in a series of portrait shots, thus enabling us to distinguish them when they appear, but that does not help to get the little fellow a break. In *The Woman I Love* a good bit was done by a young man whom I wished to credit with showing promise, but I could not make it clear to the studio which one of the several players I meant. His name undoubtedly was on the credit sheet, but I had no way of knowing which one it was. One ambitious young actor, probably sensing the difficulty under which reviewers work, took no chances on being overlooked. He phoned me a description of a bit he had done, thus to enable me to identify him when his scene came along. His idea was all right, but it did not work out satisfactorily. His bit was left on the cutting-room floor. But he is one boy I am going to look out for and give a break to when there is even a slight excuse for it.

**M**ENTAL Meanderings: What this country needs are paper inner-socks which one can wear to protect his ankles from bites of flies when one is doing his writing in the shade of a tree. . . . Quiet, please! Two mockingbirds are having a wonderful time in the bird-bath, so close to me their most distant splashes reach the paper upon which I am writing now. . . . We had one little fig on our one little fig tree and a mockingbird came along and took it. . . . Ruby Keeler is one of the SPECTATOR's many cover-to-cover readers. . . . For years he had lived in hotels or apartments, knew nothing of rural life. Recently he bought a place in our Valley, and the other day led me to the vegetable garden of his own creation. Pointing to two tiny shoots appearing above the brown earth, he murmured: "Watermelons! God, how I thrill when I look at them!" Thus he summed up the case of City vs. Country. . . . Ella Logan's real name is Daisie Marrs. It won't be long until Daisie stars. . . . *Stage* gives us the interesting information that Takako Irie, Japan's number one movie star, last year earned \$2,900. Apparently over there producers spend their money on pictures, not on people, as is our delightful custom. . . . Hugh Herbert stopped as he was driving by, but would not come in and meet Herbie, the wild duck we named after him and others; said he was late for an appointment with his dentist to get his teeth put in shape for the corn-on-the-cob season. . . . A plant in one of the flower beds and which was tended carefully since it made its appearance, turns out to be spinach, which strengthens my conviction that in a bygone age our flower garden was a vegetable garden; anyway, the amazing thing about it is that I find it delicious. Imagine, after all these years, liking spinach! . . . Reminiscing with Stanley Logan, who is directing Kay Francis at Warners, I mentioned my having been present at the opening night of *Milestones* at the Royal Theatre in London, twenty years ago. Discovered Logan was in the cast, all the members of which were listless the first night as they thought the play was without merit and was certain to be a flop. It was a sensational success. . . . Tony Moreno on the Boulevard, handsome, stalwart. Why don't we see him on the screen? What's the matter with him? . . . Have caught Eric Blore's telephone stunt preceding three different previews. Laughed heartily each time. . . . And now, having put the gladiolus in good shape—it is not gladioli, smarty, as *gladiolus* is used for both singular and plural—having put the gladiolus in good shape, I am going to have a shower, shave, then dress, go into Hollywood and probably get run over.

### MAKE THE SERIES COMPLETE

The demand for back copies of SPECTATORS containing the Editor's special articles on screen fundamentals has been so great that we have gathered all available copies from news dealers and are now in a position to fill a reasonable number of orders for the seven issues preceding this one.

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# Filmic Motion and Dialogue Direction



(This is the eighth in a series of special articles by the Editor on the fundamental principles of Motion Picture Production.)

**T**HE landscape artist interprets to please himself an isolated fragment of nature and hopes someone will like it well enough to purchase it. But even if no purchaser be forthcoming, the artist's financial loss is not great as the bit of canvas and the paints he used were inexpensive. His time? He was paid for that by the pleasure it gave him to spend it as he did. The screen artist who isolates and interprets a fragment of life, has on his hands a creation whose cost was moderate if it did not exceed a quarter of a million dollars. And the artist in this case is not an individual. It is a company which employs many different artists to express themselves as a unit in the expensive fabrication of an item of motion picture entertainment. And, in theory, tomorrow's creative activities cannot proceed until the public has returned to the company the cost of yesterday's production.

It will be seen, then, that the audience looms large in the scheme of cinematic things. It has in its hands the continued existence of the industry whose commodity is screen art. The business of the industry is to make pictures the audience will buy. In a general way it might be said the screen artist, using the term in its composite sense, who pleases himself will please the audience if he works consistently within the limits of his art. The screen is a story-telling art and its first demand is for the integrity of the thread of the story which must run in a straight line for the full length of the film without artistic deviations which may please the fancy of the artist, but which can serve only to check the essential continuity of audience interest in the story. The artist who so adorns his creation is reaching beyond the limits of his art.

**T**HE integrity of the story thread is preserved by the visual flow of pictorial images. Visual flow is not mechanical. It is born of screen technique, not applied to it. Harmony is the key note of all art. We enjoy esthetic satisfaction from an art creation only by the employment of our own impulses, and when our impulses are disturbed by lack of complete harmony in the elements of the creation, our satisfaction with it cannot be complete.

This article is being written up among the redwood trees of Northern California. These giants which for centuries have lifted proud heads toward the skies, have a kinship with motion pictures. As I stand among them and gaze upon the magnificent, awe-inspiring picture they make; as I move through the silence of their clustered stateliness, along aisles of a vast cathedral pillared by gigantic trunks and roofed by the verdured arms they stretch to one another, my imagination tells me stories of ancient deeds contemporary with their youth, of evening vespers their branches murmured long

before Columbus sat beneath a tree on our other shore; that one, I tell myself, was an adult when Charles the First was beheaded, the smaller one beside it, a healthy youth when Waterloo was fought.

Not one tree alone, but ranks of them falling into different perspectives as I walk among them, stir my imagination into a story-telling mood. The trees themselves are great, stolid towers of wood, inanimate, senseless products of climate and soil; each a unit detached and apart from the others, a thing the material eye would view merely as a great quantity of uncut lumber, its top of green throwing a shadow on soil which would be more productive in the sun. But collectively they form pictures to stir the emotions and give impulse to the imagination.

**T**HE esthetic pleasure we derive from contemplation of the redwoods is of our own creation. The trees have no majesty except that in which our emotions clothe them; the degree of esthetic satisfaction they provide is the degree in which our emotions respond to their prompting. It is a process which in no way involves our intellect. If we bring mental faculties into play, our emotions may be disturbed by material thoughts; we compute the trunks in terms of board feet of lumber and deprive ourselves of the esthetic comfort, the spiritual uplift the whole forest can bestow on us.

To enjoy a motion picture we must view it as we do the redwood trees, as we view a sunset, a waterfall or any other manifestation of nature's power to reveal beauty; we must interpret it with our imaginations and allow our emotional reactions to establish its entertainment value. The woods which change their lines of trees as we traverse them and present constantly shifting prospects to please our visual sense, are like the screen which shows us a succession of pictures which by their order suggest a continuous story to our imagination. When the pictures require the cooperation of our intellect for their interpretation, the whole creation ceases to be a motion picture.

When we enter a theatre in which a true motion picture is being shown, we step out of the material world, one of plastic figures, of three dimensions and real color, and are in a world in which none of them exists, yet without which screen creations would be meaningless to us. If we regard the figures as flat shadows and the scenes as without depth and color, as they actually are on the screen, our imagination would not function as it must if the picture is to appeal to our sense of logic and provide us with entertainment.

**O**UR enjoyment of a motion picture is determined by the degree in which our imagination is not interrupted as it weaves its story from the material provided by the screen. It is the visual flow across the screen, the logical succession of scenes progressing toward a climax, that keeps the imagination even with the camera. It is not

the physical motion in a given scene which gives the screen creation the right to be designated as a *motion picture*. There could be even more motion in a series of unrelated scenes, but they would not entertain us because they would lack the forward movement of a single story idea.

This inner flow which carries the imagination along with it is filmic motion. It is the vein which carries the lifeblood of the picture. In a previous discussion (SPECTATOR, March 27) we touch briefly upon filmic motion. Let us now analyze it more fully.

Physically, Rodin's *The Thinker* is a stolid piece of statuary, a massive, motionless hunk of bronze, as lifeless as Cleopatra's Needle and as immobile as a pyramid. But regard it. Study the attitude of the man, his unawareness, the completeness of his concentration; bring him to life, give him his proper place in a motion picture, photograph him in the same pose, with the same suggestion of immobility, and we have a perfect demonstration of the fact that filmic motion does not need physical motion to lend strength to it.

**L**ET us cast *The Thinker* in the role of an injured husband. In the next room are his wife and her lover. What is he going to do? Will he break into the room and kill them? Our emotions are aroused. He assumes the pose of the statue, and thinks. There is no movement, but we know that through his head are racing turbulent thoughts which may mean the murder of two people. Our interest is carried through the scene; the story never wavers, for all that there is no physical motion on the screen. We wait breathlessly for some indication of his decision. The very stillness of his pose, his concentration, keeps the story moving, keeps the straight line of filmic motion intact.

As a statue, *The Thinker* is regarded highly because its creator has given it the quality that in motion pictures we call filmic motion. We know the head of the bowed figure is alive with thoughts; the man's immobility and obvious concentration heighten the impression, make the statue more vivid, more alive.

The art of the screen is the art of starting filmic motion with the first turn of the camera and maintaining it in an unbroken and unbending line until the last shutter is closed. It is not created by the camera, however. The camera merely suggests it. It is the product of the intelligent blending of all the elements composing the film creation. It is the line which bears throughout the screening the weight of our interest in the story. It is the story. Sometimes it is sustained by furious physical action—horsemen dashing madly to the rescue of the imperilled heroine; sometimes it is carried along by an anxious mother, her back to the camera, quiet, still, peering through the window, hoping her daughter soon will return.

It is apparent that whatever liberties may be taken with anything else in a motion picture, filmic motion must be inviolable. But it is a rare picture in which it is not violated.

**T**HE screen shares with music and dancing a rhythmic progression of suggestions which in their complete form express something that was in the artist's mind, something the imagination uses for its own entertainment. If a symphony were halted in the middle of a movement to give the orchestra leader an opportunity to tell a funny story, or if a ballet were interrupted to let someone sing a blues song, there would be an indignant outburst by the audience prompted by such violent defilement of the art. Whatever spell the performance had created would be broken rudely and the public would refuse thereafter to patronize the artists responsible for it.

A motion picture is the only thing which will entertain permanently the audience looking for motion picture entertainment. We are agreed, I hope, that it is the art that entertains. I made reference in a previous article to Constable's *Hay Wain*, which I have viewed so many times in the National Gallery, London. There is another Constable I admire greatly, *Salisbury Cathedral*. One evening I was approaching Salisbury by motor and passed the spot where Constable set up his easel to do the painting. I asked the chauffeur to stop and back up until I was looking at the scene exactly as it appears on the artist's canvas, the stretch of picturesque English landscape with the spires of the cathedral in the background. It was quite an ordinary scene with nothing about it to warrant more than a moment's contemplation and nothing in it to give one a spiritual uplift.

**I**T was the art of Constable, not the composition he used, that provided the uplift when I viewed the painting. It is the art of the screen which entertains us when we view a screen production. The integrity of the art depends upon the degree in which the production maintains the unbroken progression of its rhythmic flow, its filmic motion. When it is broken by the intrusion of an alien element, we are snapped out of the inner world which should absorb all our attention, and when it is restored, the mood essential to the complete enjoyment of the filmic offering must be recreated. No form of screen entertainment which constantly ignores the importance of the unbroken flow of filmic motion can continue to draw paying audiences.

Our complete enjoyment of a motion picture depends upon the completeness of our absorption in it. That is elemental reasoning. The picture should include only such elements as are necessary to its unity, which comply with its esthetic demands. When our absorption is complete, we are in an inner world in which reality does not exist, and when the outer, material world is suggested by something on the screen, when our outside interests are dragged in, our absorption lessens and our enjoyment wanes in a corresponding degree.

It is not the mission of the screen to set the style in women's hats, to teach horsemanship or interior decoration. When it makes such attempts, the harmony of the creation is disturbed by the intrusion of an element not there by virtue of the demand for unity. Elaborate sets and freak costumes, not demanded on the score of unity,

outrage the esthetic sensibilities of the viewer by robbing the picture of the complete isolation, the absolute detachment from the material world, it must have if, by being good art, it is to prove to be good business. It is this complete isolation from our outside interests which permits the imagination to have full reign. My imagination cannot continue to fabricate a story from the pictorial suggestions on the screen if my attention is attracted by the hero's dressing gown or if I wonder why the heroine wears such a freakish gown.

**L**ET us liken a film audience to a sleeping man having an entertaining dream. To make our illustration of any value to our argument, we will have to take liberties with science and ignore the fact that a dream's duration is but a flash. We will regard it in terms of the actual time which would be consumed by the incidents composing the dream.

While we are aware of the physical fact of our presence in a picture house, that the house, the seats, the screen are part of our outer, material world, we could not derive any esthetic satisfaction from a motion picture until our imagination had left this outer world and entered an inner one in which we were shut off completely from everything connected with our outside interests, just as completely as the sleeper's dream is unrelated to any interest of his waking hours. As there is nothing real on the screen, we practically are dreaming when we convert flat shadows into plastic figures of living people and ascribe to the flat pictures a third dimension.

If we are in sympathy with the sleeper and wish him to enjoy his dream, we exercise great care to assure his unbroken slumber. We tiptoe about, hush the children and quiet the dog. True, we cannot quiet the street car which passes the house noisily at regular intervals, but the sleeper is used to that, and it does not waken him. But if the dog should bark, it would be something of the outside world knocking so loudly on the gate to the dream world, the sleeper would awaken and his enjoyment of the dream would be interrupted rudely.

**N**OW let us further outrage science and presume that when our man went to sleep again he could renew his dream at the point where it was interrupted. He finds it is no trouble to pick up the thread of the dream, to connect the current incident with those which preceded it, but recreating the mood the dream had established is quite another matter. He was having a fine time prior to the barking of the dog, loving the girl in the dream and hating the villain with equal intensity; but during the moment he was awake the spell was broken, the girl now is just a girl to him, and the villain just a man, and he has to pump up a new supply of love and hate before he can get going again, before his dream again purrs along with rhythmic beat. A series of such interruptions in each of his dreams finally would persuade him it was a waste of time to dream at all.

**T**HE film audience is kept in its dream world by the soothing rhythm of filmic motion. True, in the silent picture it was broken by the appearance on the screen of printed titles, but they were like the rattling street car which passed the sleeper's window; the audience was accustomed to them and they failed to arouse it from its dream. But when vulgarity obtrudes on the pattern of a scene in form ugly enough to attract attention to itself, it is like the dog's bark, a rude intrusion from beyond the borders of the dream world. It would destroy the mood previously created, necessitating its recreation when the thread of the picture is picked up again. And like the sleeper, the audience finally would resent such intrusion to the point of ceasing to patronize pictures.

An incident in a photoplay which attracts attention to itself by virtue of its dramatic intensity setting it apart from adjacent incidents, must not be regarded as an interruption of the flow of filmic motion. It does not mean the intrusion of an alien element such as the dog's bark. A particularly vicious murder which chills an audience and stands out as the high point of the story so we remember it after we have forgotten all the other incidents, is a story element having a legitimate place in the screen creation as a whole by virtue of the legitimacy of its status as an essential part of the screen drama. It is an element within an element and its right to be there is fixed by the strength it adds to the scene.

Art is applied harmony. In painting it is harmony of line and color; in music harmony of tonal elements; in literature, the harmonious word and thought progression; in motion pictures it is the progression of harmonious visual images. A creation ceases to be art when it violates this fundamental law of all arts. We agreed, however, in a previous discussion that the screen's obligations as a business justify it in taking liberties with the art. But the screen is not content with taking the fewest possible liberties. "Taking their sets of characters," writes Allardyce Nicoll in *Film and Theatre*, "they thrust these, willy-nilly, into scenes of ornate splendor, exercising their inventiveness, not to create the truly fanciful but to fashion the exaggeratedly and hyperbolically absurd. Hotels more sumptuous than the Waldorf-Astoria or the Ritz; liners outvying the pretensions of the Normandie. . . . Melodies inappropriately rich—these have crowded in on us again and yet again. Many spectators are becoming irritated and bored with scenes of this sort, for mere exaggeration of life's luxuries is not creative artistically."

**W**HILE I agree with Nicoll's diagnosis of the case, I am not in agreement with him as to its effect on the patient. Scenes such as he mentions do not bore spectators. Film studios have developed set designing to the status of high art whose creations are more fascinating than boring. Few really go beyond the "hyperbolically absurd," merely as sets. In life we accumulate such luxuries as we can and dream about the unobtainable. Those of us who cannot afford to stop at an hotel "more sumptuous than the Waldorf-Astoria," at least can project ourselves into it for the brief moment it is on the

screen; the gowns worn by the shadows which move in it can adorn the women in the audience, and the men can have their hour of strutting in luxurious surroundings real life denies them.

Audiences, I believe, really enjoy these pictorial flights, but in the degree they enjoy them as isolated elements of a screen creation is their enjoyment of the creation as a whole lessened. They are infractions of the basic law of all arts I have mentioned before—that no element of an art creation should isolate itself and attract attention to itself as an individual element. A cavalryman may view a foreign picture for the sole purpose of seeing how the cavalry horses in one of the big scenes are equipped; an interior decorator's chief interest may be in learning how the cinema set designers are handling libraries, and a landscape artist may want to study the compositions the camera brings to the screen. For each of these the one element isolates itself, but the isolation comes from the outside and is one over which the creation has no control.

The vast masses of picture patrons, however, make no such specific demands, and to them the isolated elements are intrusions which disturb the harmony essential to the creation if it is to provide complete satisfaction as entertainment.

**B**UT we not yet have discussed fully the greatest evil afflicting the talkies: the lack of intelligence displayed in the direction of dialogue. As pointed out in a previous discussion, the screen derives its greatest power to entertain from the intimate contact it establishes with its audience. The camera draws the spectator into the immediate presence of the player and the microphone enables us to hear the player's sigh. It is not necessary for the screen to project voices to us; the camera projects us into scenes until we hear for ourselves what one character says to another, thus enabling the characters to converse naturally with one another without regard for our presence as eavesdroppers. And it is the fact of our being eavesdroppers hearing intimate conversations not intended for our ears, standing by the boy when he tells the girl he loves her, listening while the husband exchanges confidences with his wife, being present in the closely guarded room when the plan to rob the bank is outlined—these are the things which give the screen a closer relationship with its audience than any other art can establish.

But all of us many, many times have heard the boy fairly shout his declaration of love at the girl held in his embrace; have heard the husband shout his secrets to his wife; have heard criminals plan crimes in tones so loud they could be heard by anyone moving along the corridor past the closely guarded door. Only yesterday I saw a picture in which two characters, previously established as gunmen, meet on a crowded street and one says to the other, "The boss says to lay off Duffy," in tones loud enough to be heard by all the pedestrians within a dozen feet of them. Literally thousands of such instances of inexcusably thoughtless direction could be listed if one

looked again at the talkies he had seen and had the patience to compile the list.

**T**HERE is more in this than the irritation caused by the unnecessary volume of sound created by lines being read too loudly. We can listen complacently to a screen character shrieking at another if the scene demands a shriek. In fact, if a shriek were demanded by the drama of the scene and the character indulged in something less emphatic, the effect on the audience would be the same as if a shriek came in a place where a murmur was demanded. It all gets back to the necessity for preserving unbroken the harmony of a screen creation. And the vocal volume has nothing to do with that; the volume should be what the individual scene demands—if a howl, a howl it should be; if a whisper, a whisper it must be.

When we stand beside the boy and girl we want to hear only his murmur of love and her whispered response if we are to participate in the tenderness of the scene. In the home we wish to feel we are hearing a secret the husband desires only the wife to know, not one shared by all the neighbors with open windows. In the room where the robbers huddle we wish to see heads close together and hear directions murmured through slits in the corner of squeezed mouths—we want to *feel* the scene, to get the drama of it, to be let in on something obviously not intended for our ears. But when in these instances the conversations are carried on in casual tones without regard for the possibility of eavesdropping, we get the impression they are not important to those in them, consequently can be of no more importance to us.

But enough for this time. The discussion will be continued in the next SPECTATOR.

\* \* \*

## RUMINATIONS

**A**FTER viewing the screen version of *The Prince and The Pauper*: Hm-m-m.... Good entertainment.... Leaves one with a pleased feeling.... Those twins—cute as the dickens.... Wish Mark Twain could see them.... Maybe he can.... Can't seem to remember much about the musical background, so it must have been done in a proper manner—One felt it but did not consciously hear it.... How much Errol Flynn expresses without saying a word.... Good directing—very good directing.... Why-y-ee! There was no love interest! One doesn't realize it while viewing the picture.... Which must prove something or other.... Of course, most pictures should have a love interest—Oh, definitely, most pictures should have a love interest.... But an occasional picture that can carry on without it—like this one.... After all, one does have a sort of remembrance of the musical background—the haunting beauty of certain phrases seems to linger.... Must have been an excellent cast—the action was so finished.... That infectious laughter at the end.... Good directing—very good directing.... Now who was it produced that picture?... Hm.... Oh, yes! First National—Warners release.—*Mobel Keefer, Amsterdam, New York.*

# Guild Members and Their Bosses

By Bert Harlen

**A** *HIGHLY* significant aspect of the newly formed Screen Actor's Guild and its associate body, the Junior Guild, is the fact that these organizations are an outgrowth of the most singular development the history of any art has yet manifested—a feeling of unity, indeed of brotherhood, among its practitioners. There, of course, have been organizations in the various arts since as early in modern civilization as the medieval guilds. Each of them was formed to protect or further the interests of members, but representing only a few of countless persons engaged in an art, and frequently as not, being competitive or antagonistic to other organizations in the same art. Actors in especial always have had strong bonds of sympathy, but the stage performers, pursuing various types of stage work and for various producers, have not experienced, even in a center like New York and under the unifying influence of the Actor's Equity, that feeling of a common objective that is familiar to those engaged in the production of films. A cohesive relationship between players in Hollywood has come into being and grown, and gives every evidence of continuing to grow—a spirit, a feeling of kinship among actors great and small, renowned and forgotten, who are, or who have been, "in pictures."

The impetus for it doubtless is to be found in several factors, the similarity of experience in working at the studios, the peculiar mode of living in Southern California; but the most important factor is probably a sense of destiny pervading those engaged in the mammoth new industry which is playing an inestimable part in reordering the world. This spirit is to be found, I believe, to at least some extent in all motion picture workers, but especially has grown among the ranks of the players, creating, in them, despite superficial contests and antagonisms, an innate sympathy and understanding for their fellows. It previously has manifested itself in many ways, in theatrical benefits and charity movements, and most often in the unspoken but eloquent things which can be said when one pair of eyes meets another.

**T** *HAT* this feeling of unity will become even greater through the operation of these two organizations is inevitable. An especial significance of the groups is that they represent the first concerted effort on the part of players to compel producers to abide by more equitable principles in their relations with employees. Far from being much influenced by this spirit among the performers in the industry, the producers by their very indifference have been largely responsible for the conditions which have occasioned a need for the aid the new organizations propose to render. These leaders of the industry have much to answer for in the ruthless and senseless way in which they have taken on countless young players and dropped them to oblivion within a few months or weeks, in the unreasonable neglect of actors who have served the industry well in its begin-

ning, and in the shameful circumstance of hundreds of extra players.

Not that I believe the producers, viewed as individual men, are deserving of thorough condemnation. Doubtless each could cite numerous acts of generosity and thoughtfulness. They are, like all the captains of our existing economic system, fundamentally a well-meaning lot, who are good to the wife and kiddies and hang out the American flag on the Fourth of July. It so happens that the marshalling of the thousands of performers in Hollywood necessary to carry on the vast new industry has created problems which the producers, as a group, have not had the imagination to meet.

**L** *ACK* of precedent is partly responsible for the abuses to which players in Hollywood have been subjected. "Show-business" has always been a gambler's profession, part of the equipment of a trouper being a philosophy which enabled him to take the good with the bad. For the very principle upon which the theatre has always operated has been a rapid liquidation of those ill-fortuned enough to lose a footing, fresh talent always being in ascendance. This circumstance is largely attributable to the fact that the theatre has never been a homogeneous institution, or even a localized one, its operations being guided by many segregated men with widely varying objectives and viewpoints. Moreover, the players were nearly always in a state of flux between localities, having adjusted themselves to a nomadic existence.

But the attraction to the prodigiously publicized Hollywood of great numbers of actors and thousands of aspirants, entering into an industry stably established and by comparison homogeneous in objectives and operation, if not actually in organization—this circumstance, together with the remoteness of Hollywood from other centers and the fact that living conditions here are conducive to the setting up of residence, has created industrial and social problems which the producers have shown themselves inadequate to meet.

The new actor's organizations will do much not only to stabilize and make more secure the position of the actor in Hollywood, but also, by fostering a feeling of sympathy and understanding between the players, and of accord with the producers, ultimately will react to the good of the motion picture art. So, we salute them!



**Hollywood Cat & Dog Hospital**

Dr. H. R. Fosbinder, Veterinarian

1151 No. Highland Ave. - HE. 1515

"Where Pets are Treated Right"

# Taking the Cinematic Pulse

By Paul Jacobs

**B**ECAUSE during the past fortnight I have seen a large number of films, I have had an opportunity to study a tightly nucleated pattern of the most common and the most evident errors in filmic composition. Significantly, they nearly always are mistakes in the approach to the audience, the psychology is faulty. I would like to discuss them informally and take them up individually without attempting to establish any relationship between them other than the encompassing fact that they are a result of the same source: inaccurate envisualization of the collective audience attitude.

I think the one thing which most often strikes a discordant note is that the producer does not realize the fact that *possibility* is not half as important as *probability*. That is, most of any action rejected by an audience as being absurd, is usually quite possible of happening but is insufficiently planted in the roots of the foregoing action. Verisimilitude is achieved by so deftly weaving the details that the resultant action seems inevitable.

If the picture were to give us a slice of actual life with its endless, useless, uncertain, and pleonastic dialogues; its fruitless, aimless, chaotic action; its insignificant motives, its utterly unrelated sequences, we would find the theatres either empty or closed. It is in the carefully selective unity, the intensification of life, the telescoping of action that we find the greatest illusion. Thus, the less like life the film is, in this sense, the more completely are we drawn into it, the more acutely do we feel it, the more fully do we believe. These errors, then, are born of the fact that life, with its patternless activities, is given precedence over the illusion of reality. When producers realize that not life, but an interpretation of it, is the desire of every audience, we will have no empty seats in any theatre.

It is this trick that makes even the weird tale, if well told, appear logical. Is there anyone among us who has neither said nor heard this while watching a film: "Ah, he wouldn't do that" or, "Bunk! It couldn't happen that way"?

**W**HENEVER that phrase is uttered or thought, the producer has fallen down on his job, because there is no desired circumstance that cannot artfully be built up to, or maneuvered about, until it assumes the guise of absolute inevitability. Yet, in three different films within the past two weeks I have heard that devastating comment, "Bunk."

In direct opposition to this weakness, and quite servicable as its compensative, is a new thinness which has grown out of the new "purity code." That a clean-up was needed is true; but that stagnant prudery is a synonym for cleanliness is both silly and bad box-office. Not realizing the uses to which the commonplace may be put, and knowing only the values of sensationalism, the studios have overlooked the vast dramatic values this constriction offers.

The commonplace things of life are those aspects of living we have come to associate with fundamental and universal routine. Because this is true, anything tinged with the aura of the commonplace takes on an acquired conventionality. Therefore, the commonplace is an excellent and precise instrument in the building up of plausibility. For instance, a weird film of the Dracula type would be much more effective were it set in an extremely conventional atmosphere instead of in the morbidly exotic influence of a mouldy castle. The great English writer, W. W. Jacobs, realized this when he wrote his immortal *Monkey's Paw*. The vivid effect came of lulling the senses into a feeling of placid reality through the banal setting. The supernatural note gained ingress to our credence through this trick and vastly intensified the horrible effect.

In exactly the same manner, any form of necessary theatricism may be leavened and humanized by an injection of the commonplace, either in the atmosphere, in the characterization, or in the thematic treatment of the action.

**S**PEAKING of the action brings us to a salient point. The editors of an amazingly large percentage of films have not learned to discriminate between relevant and irrelevant material. If they would realize that every frame of film must advance the filmic flow toward the denouement, almost every picture—especially in the B category—would have many minutes sliced from its running time. Extended panoramic shots, useless clots of utterly foolish humor, endless and pointless verbiage, all would go by the board. During the past several days I have seen literally scores of absolutely nonessential screen-minutes. If it were remembered that every second in the film must have its specific purpose, this sloppiness of workmanship would cease. It is because the silent film permitted almost no waste of footage that it held its audience.

The necessity for elimination of non-essentials is that the human mind can grasp effectively only one idea at a time. Thus unity of effect is pleasing because it enwraps the many factors into a solidified unit of movement. And therein lies all art. The mind seizes upon this chunked-out concept and clearly focuses its emotions upon it. Any type of difficult focus, emotional, visual, or mental is irritating for this reason.

**T**HE same fact points to another scar—recognized bit of audience psychology. Most films have too many characters. By this, I do not mean too many actors, although "super" productions nearly always are filled to the brim with as many people as the film will register. It is merely the matter of focal attention. There are too many unimportant figures moving through the plot, pulling us away from the central action and the central character. If these subordinate members were thrust into



the background, used as supplementary or complementary reflections on the story core, and were not so vividly personalized, dramatic unity not only would be preserved, but would be intensified.

Unquestionably, the most obvious disregard of audience psychology is the ever-to-be expected fade-out clinch. The producers should know by experience that the *unexpected* or the *unusual* is the fount from which curiosity flows. And curiosity as to outcome is the basis upon which all drama is built. I have seen almost twenty pictures in two weeks, and only two of them ended without the we-knew-it-would-happen embrace. Of course the boy should get the girl. The fact that he gets her is both expected and emotionally necessary. But the manner in which this is consummated should be unusual. *It Happened One Night* is acclaimed as one of the finest film romances ever made. Remember how it ended? The boy got the girl; although we did not see this final act, the audience was completely pleased. The surprise ending was previously planted, and completely rounded out the dramatic unity. There are many ways in which the picquancy of surprise can be made to re-flavor the old recipe. In a later article we shall take them up.

Glancing back over the total of these common and unnecessary errors, we arrive at a definite conclusion based upon the ultimate filmic truth: the illusion of reality is never induced through a literal transcription of actual life. Just as even fine photographs never catch that deeper inner spark of genius which makes the masters of painting immortal, so the fractual movements of life are listless by themselves. It is solely in the perceptive interpretations, the clarity with which the sharp inner meanings are brought to light and woven into the filmic flow, that the illusion is breathed into life. It is the hidden truths, found and expressed, which make the painter great. And so it is with the filmic illusion.

**Y**OUNG, ambitious, an honor graduate from an Eastern university, he came to Hollywood resolved to study motion pictures and carve for himself a career in them. Letters from his influential father secured him what he desired, a job of some sort inside a studio. But it happened to be a job as a reader. Because he had distinguished himself in literature at college, the studio entrusted to him the duty of reading stories and passing on their suitability as screen material. His efficiency was impaired somewhat by his total lack of knowledge, not of the literary values of stories, but of motion pictures. Every time he read a story which appealed to him as a story, he endorsed it enthusiastically, but nothing recommended by him was purchased by his studio, and finally he was eased out of the job and went back to Boston, from where his father writes me, giving the above particulars. I am informed that the young fellow really wanted a job as office boy or anything else that would keep him circulating within a studio, the magnitude of his salary being of no importance. But instead of being put in a position to learn about pictures, the father complains, he was given a job that required thorough knowledge of pictures. Undoubtedly the story shortage, from which studios always seem to be suffering, is due to the fact that, in the first

instance, the judging of stories is done by people who know nothing about the screen. In a studio, reader knowledge of screen requirements is more important than knowledge of literary merits. To make a reader of a young man anxious to learn what a motion picture is, is rather a silly proceeding.

## Some Late Previews

**T**HE previous SPECTATOR contained reviews of thirteen pictures which were previewed while the issue was being written. The SPECTATOR prior to that contained nine reviews. This issue contains six, the smallest number an issue has contained in years. It is a situation over which we have no control, as the number of press previews offered between issues determines the number of reviews each issue carries. The SPECTATOR does not cover previews to which it is not invited. The usual production course is to preview each picture several times before the final editing is determined. The press is then invited to view it. We consider it unfair to a picture to catch it as a "sneak preview," hence we wait to view it when it is put in the shape in which it will be shown to the public.

### Decidedly Brilliant Comedy

I MET HIM IN PARIS, Paramount release of Wesley Ruggles production. Directed by Wesley Ruggles. Stars Claudette Colbert. Screen play by Claude Binyon; based on story by Helen Meinardi; musical direction, Boris Morros; photographed by Leo Tover; special photographic effects, Farciot Edouart; art directors, Hans Dreier and Ernst Fegte; film editor, Otho Lovering; costumes, Travis Banton; assistant to Wesley Ruggles, Arthur Jacobson. Cast: Melvyn Douglas, Robert Young, Lee Bowman, Mona Barrie, George Davis, Fritz Feld, Rudolph Amendt, Egon Brecher, Hans Joby, George Sorrel, Louis Le Bey, Jacques Vanaire, Gennaro Curci, Eugene Borden, Fernando Garcia, Albert Morin, Arthur Hurni, Albert Poulet, Jacques Lory, Francisco Maran, Yola D'Avril, Jean De Briac. Running time, 87 minutes.

**E**XCEEDINGLY clever. One of the SPECTATOR's old-established contentions is that the story is not important, a contention, by the way, which has been challenged more frequently than any other we have advanced. Writers, particularly, take exception to it. See *I Met Him in Paris*. You will find it delightful entertainment, yet all the story it contains could be written in a couple of dozen words. And in stating that, I can imagine no

## SIDNEY BLACKMER

Played

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

In

"THIS IS MY AFFAIR"

For 20th Century-Fox

\* \* \* a really startling portrait of the late President Theodore Roosevelt brought back to life by the magnificent acting of Sidney Blackmer. — Welford Beaton, Hollywood Spectator.

greater praise to bestow on the skill displayed by Claude Binyon, who did the screen play. He has taken four unimportant people and makes us chuckle for an hour and a half over the unimportant things which happen to them, little things which have happened or could happen to any of us. A picture depends for its entertainment quality in a large degree upon the extent to which we can see ourselves in it. This Wesley Ruggles production has such qualities.

As I write, my attention is diverted by the mimic warfare being carried on around my chair on the lawn by Bo Peep, the Peke, and Freddie, the spaniel puppy, the objective being the possession of an old shoe, the most cherished item on their list of playthings which I have to kick out of their way when I mow the lawn. They are not telling me a story, but they are providing me with amusing entertainment. There is no plot for them to follow, but if a writer could set down on paper the antics they are going through, and a director could make them do the things set forth in the script, we would have an exceedingly amusing piece of screen entertainment. That is virtually what Binyon has done in *I Met Him in Paris*; has given us four people almost as irresponsible as the puppies, has outlined diverting things for them to do, and we grin all the time we watch them being done. So the story is not important, but the manner in which what there is of it is told, is a matter of vast importance, for upon it depends the degree of satisfaction the picture gives us.

## HARRY SEGALL

SCREEN PLAY

### "There Goes My Girl"

FOR

R. K. O.

Harry Segall wrote a really excellent screen play.

*Welford Beaton,  
Hollywood Spectator*

AND here is where Wesley Ruggles come in. He visualized, not a story, but a motion picture; he realized we go to a film theatre for entertainment, that we are indifferent as to the means taken to entertain us—whether a couple of puppies trying to outwit one another for possession of an old shoe, a creepy murder mystery, or just four ordinary people doing ordinary things—being of no concern to us as long as whatever is offered holds our attention. So Wesley saw to it that we were provided with much to look at; presumed rightly that we would accept the hills of Idaho as the mountains of Switzerland, and figured he could take his four talented players and make them do in attractive surroundings a whole lot of amusing things so entertainingly that we would not care two hoots if half the things had no story value. The result is a picture which really is brilliant.

Claude Binyon's screen play is a masterly example of film writing, one noted for smooth story progression and the display of a keen sense of humor in dialogue passages. The flashes of wit are woven so cleverly into the speeches that they have the desirable quality apparently of being the spontaneous utterances of the players and not lines interpolated to demonstrate what a clever fellow the author of the screen play is. Many of the scenes have magnificent backgrounds provided by nature and admirably photographed by Leo Tover. Music is one of the production's important embellishments, credit for which is due Boris Morros, head of the studio's music department, and John Leipold, who composed the helpful score; and all the various elements have been worked into a satisfactory whole by one of the nicest jobs of direction we have had in a long time. I cannot recall a previous Ruggles picture which revealed such a keen sense of humor, such realization of the comedy value of a sly grin, the carefully shaded intonation of an irrelevant aside or the implication conveyed in a mere glance. In two places a bit player in the role of bartender looks quizzically at his customer, only his eyes revealing his thoughts, and both times the tickled preview audience laughed heartily. That is good direction.

ANOTHER bit, done by Fritz Feld, brings forcibly before us the importance of developing all the entertainment values of a script. Fritz plays an hotel clerk. As the part is written, anyone who can read lines could have played it, as it deals only with routine hotel affairs. But the combination of Wesley's direction and Fritz's acting makes the little part stand out as one of the big things in the picture. The Feld scenes are authentic. We do not regard him as a screen comedian pretending he is an hotel clerk; but rather as an hotel clerk so funny he really should be on the screen. Such is the result of good direction and good acting.

And there is a dress designer, a young woman who works in New York and who saved money for three years to spend on one glorious holiday in Paris—she certainly should be on the screen. Her name is Kay Denham. For some reason, probably camera shyness, she persuaded Claudette Colbert to impersonate her, and not even their best friends would detect the substitution. Kay is a love-

ly girl,—not an actress, of course, just a designer of smart gowns—and every detail of Claudette's impersonation is so perfect no one in the audience could become aware he was looking at an actress playing a part. To me, it is Claudette's most brilliant performance. She was not given even one dramatic scene, not one "big moment" she could get her teeth into; rather is it a purely psychological part, one she has to think her way through and keep us posted on the trend of her thoughts. Her task was by no means an easy one, but so smoothly does she accomplish it, so completely is she the young woman she plays, there is no evidence of effort in even her most exacting scenes.

Melvyn Douglas, Robert Young, and Mona Barrie also give sincere, impressive performances, Young's being by all odds the best of his screen career. To the cast, and to Ruggles and Binyon, go plaudits for one of the smartest comedies we have had in years.

## One Hour of Brawls

THE LADY ESCAPES, 20th-Fox picture and release. Leslie L. Landau, associate producer; directed by Eugene Forde; screen play by Don Ettlinger; based on novel and play, MY SECOND WIFE, by Eugene Heltai; photographed by Lucien Andriot; art direction by Albert Hogsett; Al De Gaetano, film editor; musical direction by Samuel Kaylin; William Forsyth, assistant director. Cast: Gloria Stuart, Michael Whalen, George Sanders, Cora Witherspoon, Gerald Oliver-Smith, June Brewster, Howard Hickman, Joseph Tozer, Don Alvarado, Maurice Cass, Franklin Pangborn, Tom Ricketts. Running time, 63 minutes.

SOME nice direction by Eugene Forde is the only thing which saves this one from being a total loss. Perhaps I should include also the sets by Hogsett and the photography of Lucien Andriot; and, come to think of it, Leslie Landau is to be commended for turning out such a visually worthwhile production job. But the story! It positively is too silly for words. I do not refer to the screen play by Don Ettlinger. He did as well as one could with the material the story provided. The person to blame is the one who selected the story in the first place.

Gloria Stuart and Michael Whalen marry in the first sequence and quarrel all the way through the rest of it. That is the story. Gloria throws things at Mike and one of the greatest story weaknesses is that she does not hit him with the first thing she throws, knock him out and bring the picture to an abrupt end, thereby sparing us a

long series of missile-hurling which reveals a sad lack of accurate aim. But the picture interested me. It was mentally stimulating to try to figure out how the studio convinced itself that disagreeable brawls between husband and wife could become agreeable entertainment. Characterized visually as refined people, the two behave themselves like a couple of ill-bred jackasses whose vocabularies consist entirely of cheap epithets unleavened by a sense of humor. The story does not come to a logical end. It merely stops at the end of one of the major quarrels, and we know that immediately following the fade-out another series will begin. The whole picture is about as unpleasant as one could be.

**DIRECTOR FORDE** did as well as one could with the impossible story. Usually a bad picture is due to bad direction, but *The Lady Escapes* is a queer thing in that it is bad in spite of excellent direction. Physically the story is one of rapid action, and Forde keeps it moving swiftly and smoothly. All we ask of a director is that he hold a mirror up to nature and allow us to see things as they would happen in real life. Forde does this. It is not his fault that the happenings which he presents so authentically are devoid of entertainment values, that they are more boring than entertaining. He handles his dialogue intelligently, keeping his warriors from making too much noise even when their tempers are mastering what little brains they have.

*The Lady Escapes* will not do any good to the members of the cast. She does not escape soon enough to en-

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**BETTY LAIDLAW**  
and  
**ROBERT LIVELY**  
SCREEN PLAY  
**'THE GIRL SAID NO'**

Betty Laidlaw and Robert Lively write an excellent screen play. —Welford Beaton, Hollywood Spectator.

The film has snappy dialogue by Betty Laidlaw and Robert Lively.—Daily Variety.

This spirited and surprisingly convincing story, with its friendliness and sympathetic character development, has been scripted by Betty Laidlaw and Robert Lively with a wealth of incident and sprightly dialog that blends it smoothly with the musical element.—The Hollywood Reporter.

**ARTHUR KAY**  
MUSICAL DIRECTION  
**'THE GIRL SAID NO'**

A big share of the picture's success is due to the masterly musical direction of Arthur Kay. —Hollywood Spectator

Music is an important item and stands up in value under the direction of Arthur Kay. —Daily Variety

The musical direction of Arthur Kay is notably spirited.—Hollywood Reporter.

able us to carry away a pleasant impression of what we have seen. Anyone impressionable enough to accept a player as the person he plays and who in this picture sees Michael Whalen for the first time, will be apt to put him down as a complete ass for marrying a girl as silly as the girl Gloria Stuart plays, and thereafter the impressionable person probably will steer shy of pictures in which either of them appears. That is the harm a poor role does the person who plays it. No fault can be found with the manner in which all the players in this picture acquit themselves. George Sanders gives an outstanding performance. Cora Witherspoon, Gerald Oliver-Smith and June Brewster have prominent roles.

**Meet Miss Joan Fontaine**

**YOU CAN'T BEAT LOVE, RKO.** Directed by Christy Cabanne; produced by Robert Sisk; screen play by David Silverstein and Maxwell Shane; from the story, **QUINTUPLETS TO YOU**, by Olga Moore; photographed by Russell Metty, A.S.C.; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate, Feild M. Gray; gowns by Edward Stevenson; recorded by George D. Ellis; edited by Ted Cheesman; assistant director, Doran Cox. Cast: Preston Foster, Joan Fontaine, Herbert Mundin, William Brisbane, Alan Bruce, Paul Hurst, Bradley Page, Berton Churchill, Frank M. Thomas, Harold Huber, Paul Guilfoyle, Barbara Pepper.

**O**NLY by daring his employer to get up, could Herbert Mundin, valet, succeed in getting Preston Foster, employer, out of bed. Thus is it planted in the opening sequence of *You Can't Beat Love* that Preston is so constituted he simply cannot resist doing anything anyone dares him to do. Fortunately no one in the picture dares him to eat a dish of carpet tacks or jump off the top of a skyscraper. A couple of friends dare him to dress himself in top hat, white tie and tails and work on the street with a gang of laborers, and, of course, he does it. While so engaged he meets Joan Fontaine and she dares him to run for mayor against her father. And, of course, he does it. And that's the story. No one dares him to stop running, so he goes through to the end.

It is an exceedingly slender idea upon which to base even a light comedy, but if you will accept the premise, you will find the picture pleasantly entertaining. More than is usual in talkies, the camera is relied upon to tell a considerable part of the story, and Russell Metty's photography is of excellent quality throughout. The screen play moves things along at a lively rate under Christy Cabanne's direction. Apparently the picture was shot in a hurry, close-ups in several instances not matching the longer shots, faults probably due to the film editor's lack of sufficient footage to work with. Cabanne's direction of the dialogue is particularly effective as there is none of the shouting which characterizes so many pictures.

**T**HE handsome Preston Foster handles his light role with true realization of its possibilities. He is one of our most intelligent and agreeable actors, being successful always in being completely the person he is playing. He has a wide range of characterizations to his credit and I can recall none whose values were not fully developed. Paul Hurst may be relied upon to acquit himself capably in any part which gives him opportunities to display his skill as a character actor. He is particularly effective in this picture. Two others who distinguish themselves are

Harold Huber and Paul Guilfoyle. I would like to see the latter again in a role as big as that he played in *Winterset*. Bradley Page is quietly effective as a crooked politician, and Berton Churchill does well in a similar role.

But the performance which I think will interest Hollywood for personal reasons is that of Joan Fontaine, the young miss who is determined to make her own way without leaning on the rising fame of her beautiful and accomplished sister, Olivia de Havilland. Joan will get there. She is a lovely creature with a charm of personality which makes us credit nature with bunching its hits when it was equipping the de Havilland family. Joan is still young, and a few rough spots in her acting are visible, but she has everything the screen demands and you may put her down as a young woman who is destined to reach stardom rapidly and break the hearts of a few million young men scattered throughout the world. She is the kind of girl whom the older people also will love. It took only this first important appearance to capture my affection completely.

### Little, But Good Entertainment

LET THEM LIVE, Universal picture and release. Edmund Grainger, associate producer; directed by Harold Young; screen play by Bruce Manning and Lionel Houser; from original story by Richard Wormser; musical direction by Lou Forbes; photographed by James Van Trees; John Rawlins, film editor; special effects by John P. Fulton; art direction by Jack Otterson; associate art director, John Ewing; Donald Gallaher, dialogue director. Cast: John Howard, Nan Grey, Edward Ellis, Judith Barrett, Robert Wilcox, Bennie Bartlett, Henry Kolker, Robert Warwick, William Davidson and Ralph Remley. Running time, 71 minutes.

**T**HIS Universal picture was previewed on an evening when something else was shown, consequently I missed it. I stayed in my seat after the preview of *You Can't Beat Love* at the Hillstreet Theatre, intending to remain just long enough to see how *Let Them Live* got started. I remained to the end and never for a moment did my interest lag. It is not a big picture, has no big names in it, but I have seen many of the big ones which bored me exceedingly, and this little one entertained me in a most satisfactory manner. I think it would give satisfaction to any audience. As I viewed it, the thought came to me that the problem of the film industry is to get people into film theatres, that the matter of entertaining them when they are in is a relatively simple matter. *Let Them Live* was the secondary item on the Hillstreet's dual-bill program,

LEWIS J. RACHMIL

ART DIRECTOR

"THE GIRL SAID NO"

The art direction of Lewis J. Rachmil is a high achievement. —Daily Variety

Lewis J. Rachmil designed an imposing production. —Hollywood Spectator

◆

ANDREW

L.

STONE

Wrote the Original Story

Produced

and

Directed

"THE GIRL SAID NO"

◆



# EUGENE FORDE

DIRECTED

“THE LADY ESCAPES”

FOR

20th Century Fox

Eugene Forde comes through with a job that will stand every test. He keeps the picture moving at the fast pace indicated by the script and gets the maximum in realistic performances.—Daily Variety.

Physically the story is one of rapid action and Forde keeps it moving swiftly and smoothly. All we ask of a director is that he hold a mirror up to nature and allow us to see things as they would happen in real life. Forde does this.—Welford Beaton, Hollywood Spectator.



and its drawing power probably was confined to its assurance of bulk in the way of an evening's entertainment. The difference in what the picture will earn for Universal and what its merits entitle it to earn, can be charged to the whole industry's folly in teaching the public to buy names instead of pictures.

There is a thought in *Let Them Live*—the social and economic importance of giving our children a chance to develop healthy bodies. Richard Wormser's creditable original story was made into a fast-moving screen play by Bruce Manning and Lionel Houser, and Harold Young has given it, on the whole, enlightened direction. His main lapse is an exhibition of stupidity which we see in so many pictures—two people on a dance floor carrying on what should be an intimate conversation, in tones so loud they could be heard by every other couple on the floor, yet no one apparently hears what is said.

**W**HEN a motion picture director takes his wife to a party, it is safe to presume that even their most conventional utterances while dancing are addressed only to one another, and not to the entire roomful of people. To speak louder would be to become vulgar. Why, then, do so many of them make their screen players display vulgarity by being indifferent to the presence of others? The story significance of all such conversations is lost by this method of presentation. Conversations on dance floors started in silent pictures when we could not hear them, therefore we were permitted to imagine that voices were kept low. Since the screen went talkie the practice continues because so many of our directors confine themselves to imitating what has been done before. They do not *think*.

But in all other respects Young's work is good. He gives us, in the person of John Howard, a thoroughly likable young man who handles his role well. Nan Grey, one of those engaging *Three Smart Girls*, gives an appealing performance which holds promise of a successful screen career. Judith Barrett also strikes a pleasing note. Edward Ellis is superb as the understanding though crooked political boss, and Henry Kolker presents us with a little acting gem. Jack Otterson and John Ewing are responsible for some attractive settings. To Edmund Grainger, producer, goes credit for a very nice production job. It is not his fault that in the search for big names, a lot of picture patrons will overlook the opportunity to have a pleasant hour with this Universal offering.

## Two from R.K.O. Not O.K.

**MEET THE MISSUS**, Radio production and release. Albert Lewis, associate producer; directed by Joseph Santley; screen play by Jack Townley, Bert Granet and Joel Sayre; from story, *LADY AVERAGE*, by Jack Goodman and Albert Rice; musical director, Roy Webb; photographed by Jack Mackenzie; edited by Frederic Knudtson; assistant director, Eddie Donahue. Cast: Victor Moore, Helen Broderick, Anne Shirley, Alan Bruce, Edward H. Robbins, William Brisbane, Frank M. Thomas, Ray Mayer, Ada Leonard, George Irving, Alec Craig, Willie Best, Virginia Sale, Jack Norton. Running time, 65 minutes.

**THERE GOES MY GIRL**, R.K.O. Producer, William Siström; director, Ben Holmes; story, George Beck; screen play, Harry Segall; photographer, Joseph H. August; special effects, Vernon L. Walker; film editor, Desmond Marquette; assistant director,

Kenny Holmes. Cast: Gene Raymond, Ann Sothorn, Gordon Jones, Richard Lane, Frank Jenks, Bradley Page, Joan Woodbury, Marla Shelton, Alec Craig, Joseph Crehan, William Corson,

**Q**UITE satisfactory for the trade for which it is intended. As one-half of a dual bill it will help round out an evening's entertainment if the other half is not pretty bad. It is a frothy thing which gives Helen Broderick and Victor Moore a chance to repeat their comedy tricks but offers them nothing they can get their teeth into and demonstrate to us again what excellent artists they are. After seeing Moore in *Make Way for Tomorrow* it was hard to accept him as a comedy barber even though he acquits himself with as much skill within the limits of the comedy role as he did when portraying so vividly and with such emotional power the pathetic husband in the Paramount picture. Miss Broderick likewise develops all the possibilities of her part, but I still am hoping she someday will be given a characterization worthy of her skill.

Al Lewis, producer, and Joseph Santley, director, had a tough assignment when called upon to produce good results with a restricted budget and a loosely constructed story. The same story, however, would have been more entertaining if the budget had permitted Lewis to assemble a more experienced cast.

**T**HE other RKO offering, *There Goes My Girl*, had more to start with in the way of story, but comes out as a pretty poor specimen of screen craftsmanship. Ann Sothorn and Gene Raymond are characterized as nice people, reporters on rival papers, a profession which implies education. In his opening speech Gene mispronounces the "fide" in "bona fide" (the final e should be sounded); enters Ann's spacious and artistic apartment and keeps his hat on while visiting her; in various other scenes the two scream insults at each other in the hearing of scores of strangers; they storm into a cafe, yelling at one another, Gene keeps his hat on while the meal is being served; they rush out to the street and continue to behave with a little less regard for good taste than we reasonably would expect from two drunken longshoremen.

The incidents I enumerate, and a score or more others equally preposterous, could be legitimate elements of a talkie if worked in with sufficient cleverness to justify their presence. Ben Holmes reveals no cleverness in his direction. He had a story with real possibilities. If the squabbling of the two leads had been carried on in whispers to keep it from alien ears; if good taste had been the dominant note of the stormy romance, a really clever comedy would have resulted. But as it comes to us it reveals no sense of humor in the direction, maintains no definite mood, and makes far too much noise. The preview audience greeted it with considerable laughter, in which at times I joined heartily. My criticism is based upon the conviction that it could have been a sparkling comedy if all its possibilities had been developed.

William Sistrom, producer of the picture, provided a competent production for it, and Harry Segall wrote a really excellent screen play. Another creditable feature is the photography of Joseph August.



# WILLIAM

## A.

# SEITER

Directed

"THIS IS MY AFFAIR"  
FOR 20th CENTURY-FOX

Current Production

'THE LIFE OF THE PARTY'  
FOR R. K. O.



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 . . . It's only playing way down town" or  
 . . . It hasn't been available for years"

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CENTS

# S P E C T A T O R

Twelfth Year

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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Number 10

AUGUST 14, 1937

Volume 12

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## Paging Mr. Charlie McCarthy

**We Call Him as Expert Witness to Prove One of Our Contentions  
Regarding Application of Rules of Screen Art to  
Making of Motion Pictures**

## Directors and Their Jobs

**Many of Them Intuitively Apply to Their Creations the Fundamental  
Laws of the Art Without Being Aware of  
Their Existence**

## Spectator To Be a Weekly

**Beginning with Issue of September Eleven Will Appear Every Seven  
Days Instead of Every Two Weeks as at Present**

---

## Reviews of the New Pictures

THAT CERTAIN WOMAN ★ DEAD END ★ ARTISTS AND MODELS ★ SOULS  
AT SEA ★ FLIGHT FROM GLORY ★ LOVE UNDER FIRE ★ BACK IN  
CIRCULATION ★ VOGUES OF 1938 ★ IT'S ALL YOURS ★ CHARLIE CHAN  
ON BROADWAY ★ THE SHEIK STEPS OUT ★ HEROES OF THE ALAMO  
MASQUERADE IN VIENNA ★ THE LAST NIGHT



From the

# Editor's Easy Chair

**B**EGINNING with the issue of September 11, Hollywood Spectator will become a weekly publication.

We might say the move is prompted solely by our altruistic desire to be of further service to the cause of screen entertainment; that our determination to double the number of Spectators published each year is due to the insistent demand of our readers for more frequent issues; that exhibitors are impatient at having to wait two weeks between installments of our reviews, upon which they so largely depend—

We might say a lot of stuff like that, but all of it would be hooey.

We thought up the weekly business all by ourselves, and, as far as we know, only the printer, mailer, the paper house and ourselves approve the idea.

The Spectator is to become a weekly solely because we figure we can make more money with it that way. It never has concerned itself greatly with making money. We were content if its revenue was just sufficient to keep it going. But of late, for some reason or other, it is attracting more attention than ever, is being quoted more widely than it ever had been, is receiving subscriptions and inquiries from all parts of the world.

**A**LL this would indicate the Spectator is a good thing. And that has put the gleam of gold in our eye and determined us to make a good thing out of it—if that be possible. Anyway, our motive in making it a weekly is purely mercenary.

Frankly, we do not believe any Hollywood film publication can become a great financial success without trimming its editorial sails to the winds of financial expediency. For nearly a dozen

years the Spectator has maintained an absolutely honest editorial policy, not because its editor is honest, but because he is too lazy to make the mental effort involved in writing in a manner to make believable something he himself does not believe. That is hard work. It is much easier to write what he thinks and get back to his garden, take the dogs for a run or feed the ducks.

The same editorial policy will govern the writing of the weekly, even though it is a policy which throughout its dozen years has not gained it one page of the advertising with which big producing organizations flood all the other film publications. The heads of those organizations are so delightfully oblivious to the significance of the principles which should govern the making of their product, that we really believe their reading of the Spectator bewilders them.

**T**HE Spectator's conviction that good screen art means good screen business, is not a revenue producing argument to use with executives who are totally unaware there is such a thing as screen art. But it is a conviction which will continue to govern its editorial policy, for we believe it applies equally to us—that a good editorial policy must ultimately be good publication business.

There will be no increase in the Spectator's subscription price. If we get a fair share of advertising, we can afford to deliver fifty-two Spectators for what we now charge for twenty-six. And anyway, five dollars for a year's subscription is such a nicely rounded-off price and so easily added up, that we hate to change it. For instance, tell me quickly how much nine subscriptions at \$7.85 each would come to. It simply can't be done.

**A**CTING is, essentially, fifty-fifty physical and emotional and has very little to do with the brain. . . . The dots are to indicate a pause to give actresses and actors time to get mad at me for suggesting that they do not necessarily have to have brains, for if their profession is fifty per cent physical and fifty per cent emotional, nothing whatever is left to exercise the brain. Mad? Well, let me tell you that the words before the dots were written by Leslie Howard in course of a particularly readable article in last month's *Stage*.

\* \* \*

**O**NE of the phrases appearing frequently in SPECTATOR arguments is "perfect illusion of reality." We contend that screen art gets its strength as entertainment from its ability to create a more complete illusion of reality than any other art can create. Reality, obviously, must be the most disturbing factor in a creation of an art of the *illusion* of reality. That is why the SPECTATOR stubbornly has fought for less dialogue, no mechanically produced sounds and no color photography on the screen. Such things inject reality into the art and rob it of some of its strength.

The SPECTATOR never has opposed the use of audible dialogue as a substitute for the titles that formerly expedited the telling of stories when the screen was silent; but it has protested against the screen's wholesale surrender to the living theatre when the microphone made such surrender possible. The living theatre is dying because the screen can do better everything the theatre has done or has striven to do. The theatre audience still exists, but it now is seeking its plays in the picture houses.

**O**NE fundamental weakness of the theatre has been its lack of intimacy, its aloofness from its audience. Its footlights constituted a boundary line between two worlds. The screen wiped out the boundary and made the two worlds one by advancing its audience into the immediate presence of the players. But while the theatre is fighting desperately for its continued existence, the screen has taken to itself and embraced as part of its technique the very weaknesses which led to the undoing of the theatre. It has made dialogue its story-telling medium, transferred to the microphone the duties of the camera, and given stage players the preference over its own trained talent. When the screen was silent, its greatest strength as entertainment was the fact of its being compelled to leave so much to the imagination of its audience, thus bringing its patrons to a more common mental level than any other art ever had done. It was for all ages and all mentalities, for each patron saw in every picture what his imagination could create. If, when given sound, it had retained all its source of strength and contented itself solely with making audible what had been silent titles, it would have children today to make its audiences larger, and practically all pictures would be earning substantial profits. The film industry is prosperous, but the measure of an industry's success is not determined by the dividends it is paying, but by the dividends it should be paying.

To support my argument that the illusion of reality, not the "touch of reality" which our picture makers strive so hard to attain, is the main strength of screen entertainment, I have a witness to call to the stand. Who is

America's outstanding comedian today? Who is the only one who has the entire nation laughing? Who is closer to the hearts of the people than any other American, male or female? Charlie McCarthy, of course. And who is Charlie McCarthy? A block of wood. Who is Edgar Bergen? Oh, he's just the fellow on whose knee Charlie sits while he is entertaining us. We are not interested in Bergen, so let us get back to Charlie. How can he, a block of wood, entertain us? He doesn't. We use him to entertain ourselves, just as we used to use silent pictures to entertain ourselves. We *know* Charlie is only a block of wood, but we *imagine* he is a mischievous boy, a lovable little fellow, full of fun and possessed of a sense of humor. Unless our imaginations function to that extent, our intelligence would be affronted by a request that we should listen to him. Be entertained by a block of wood? Preposterous! And if you urge recognition of the act as a remarkable demonstration of the art of ventriloquism, let me ask how many of you think of the art when listening to Charlie's duels of wit with Bill Fields.

**B**ERGEN would be the hero and Charlie only a block of wood if we regarded the act solely as an exhibition of extraordinary skill, if it were an act which prompted only artistic appreciation. And if what Charlie says were all that entertained us, we could get just as much entertainment if a real boy sat on Bergen's lap and spoke the lines. And if Bergen employed a real boy he would be doing to his act only what motion picture producers are doing to their pictures—he would be doing everything he could to prevent the functioning of our imaginations. It is Charlie's complete isolation from everything real that makes our imaginations accept him so completely as something real, which makes us forget Bergen and bestow all our applause on Charlie. Of course we know it is all Bergen, that he has become one of the world's greatest entertainers, just as we know it is Barbara Stanwyck when we cry over the grief of the mother in *Stella Dallas*. Charlie can stir our emotions more easily than Barbara can because he is more completely an illusion, whereas Barbara's voice is her own, the voices of the rest of the cast are real, and every mechanical sound incidental to the various scenes is recreated to lessen the audience's sense of illusion, to deny it the full play of its imagination.

**P**ITY of it is that the film industry will not permit the wise little Charlie McCarthy to teach it anything. I do not know how picture producers account for his popularity. They will continue to inject as much reality as possible into their pictures, to can as much noise as possible for distribution throughout the world, to comfort themselves with the greatest illusion of reality the screen has created—the illusion of producers that they know the nature of the business they are in.

\* \* \*

**L**ET us get away from pictures for a moment and for the benefit of those who may be suffering from it, discuss sciatica. For three months I had it and that means three months of pain. I wonder now how I refrained from snarling at every picture I reviewed, as going to previews was a painful experience. I tried the usual methods of treating the malady, but steadily grew worse. One

day a friend bought me a bottle of Ro-Mari. I never had heard of it, never had given a moment's consideration to any proprietary medicine, always having thought their advertisements were bunk. But because my friend told me Lionel Barrymore and Hugh Walpole had endorsed Ro-Mari publicly, I agreed to try it. The druggist, my friend informed me, said my case, as described to him, should yield to not more than two bottles. I followed the diet outlined by the Ro-Mari people and faithfully took the medicine at the times prescribed, and the two bottles did their work. I have no more sciatica, feel many years younger. I never before wrote anything of this nature; I know no one connected with the Ro-Mari concern, have no selfish interest to serve. But I have had sciatica, know what it feels like, and feel I should let other sufferers know how I got rid of it. I believe Ro-Mari also is beneficial in the treatment of arthritis, neuritis and kindred ailments. However, you can find out all about it by telephoning EXposition 3151.

\* \* \*

**W**HEN *Firefly* was previewed at the Chinese Theatre, the man in the projection booth stepped up the sound until it was deafening. If he is working only for the theatre and is not in the pay of nerve specialists, he should be a little kinder to audiences. Attending a preview at the Chinese always is somewhat devastating to the ears.

\* \* \*

**O**NE number of a magazine which no one interested in the stage or screen must overlook is the August issue of *Stage* (New York). It is the "Fond Memories" number, one of the most extraordinary publication feats in the history of dramatic entertainment. It is crowded with fond memories, which it robs of years by treating each great show one remembers as if it opened last night. It reviews a Ziegfeld show and illustrates it with scenes in which appear Lillian Lorraine, W. C. Fields, Will Rogers, Eddie Cantor, Harry Kelly, Ann Pennington and Marilyn Miller. It tells us of the first night of *Maytime*, of *The Belle of New York*. It shows us a youthful John Barrymore. It recounts as news of yesterday the sensational success of an unknown young woman named Maude Adams; it tells of a new triumph by Mrs. Fiske, of the success the Vernon Castles are having in popularizing the dance, of Frances Starr's outstanding performance in *The Easiest Way*. It brings back to us Edwin Booth, Joe Jefferson, and announces the success of a new play, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It also introduces to us a new screen comedian, Charlie Chaplin. I have itemized perhaps one-tenth of the features which make this number of *Stage* one which demands a permanent place in your library.

\* \* \*

**T**UCKED away on a pine-clad hill about six miles this side of Carmel on the Carmel Highway, is the Peter Pan Lodge, one of the most fascinating public sojourning places it ever has been my good fortune to discover. Through the pines which grow straight and tall in front of it, there is a vista of the most attractive coast line along the Pacific, and the lodge itself is the last word in comfort and hospitality. It can accommodate only fourteen guests. The story behind it is interesting. Caroline

A. Pickitt and Dorothy M. Ledyard served as nurses during the world war, their experiences breeding a spirit of adventure in them. When peace came, they wanted to do something—anything except taking up again their school-teaching jobs. On no capital except their personalities, they opened a small boarding-house sort of place in Carmel and ran it as they thought a home should be run. In their rambles around the Carmel country they discovered the spot Peter Pan Lodge now covers and dreamed about some day building it. But at the rate they were making money—they charged so little for the much they gave—it was calculated it would require something over two hundred years to accumulate sufficient funds to realize their dreams. Then one day a little old lady came to them. She stayed three months, grumbling most of the time about the absence of clocks in the house and declaring frequently that when she died she was going to leave a clock to the Pickitt-Ledyard establishment. A year after she had departed for her home in the east, a lawyer called up Miss Pickitt. The little old lady had died and in her will was specified the clock she had promised. "How nice of her," said Miss Pickitt, "thank you very much." "Wait a minute, hold the phone," exclaimed the lawyer. "She also left twenty thousand dollars in cash to you and a like amount to Miss Ledyard." So Peter Pan Lodge came into being. And if you visit it, get the spirit of it, meet its hostesses, you will understand why the little old lady made it possible.

\* \* \*

**S**OMETHING a director said to me the other day is interesting. We were discussing my review of his latest picture. "You are the only critic who has grasped what I strive for in my work," he said. Then, after a pause, he went on, "I didn't know myself what it was until I read your review." A director who gets a fortune for every picture he directs—and he is not aware of his own technique. And that is what makes him worth all the money he gets. Each art came before its own technique; the first painter who blended two colors did not have any technical knowledge to guide him, but his experiment had a technical result. Technique is merely standardized results of experiments. Screen art is too young to have developed a definite technique. Our best directors are guided by their intuition. They are the founders of a new art whose technique they will establish. The director I quote has an individual way of getting camera results, a method of shooting which I finally detected in all his pictures and to which I referred in my review. That he was unaware of it himself is no reflection on his intelligence. He merely uses something born in him and which probably would lose some of its strength if he applied it objectively instead of subjectively. When the SPECTATOR was carrying the series of articles on screen fundamentals which spread over nine issues, another director told me he hoped I soon would reach the end of them. "I read them and puzzle over them," he said, "but I can't understand what you are getting at." He is among the first ten directors in the business, one whose pictures contain almost everything the articles advocated and who rarely brings in a production that is not among the year's best box-office performers. In all this is hidden somewhere the

reason why nearly all critics are not workers in the arts they criticize. Both the directors I quote would make almost as bad a job at writing a film criticism as I would make at directing a picture.

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**O**N my recent holiday jaunt I met Frederick A. Drebes, a fellow guest at the Santa Maria Inn. Mr. Drebes gave Los Angeles its first lithograph plant, but his business had not grown sturdy enough to withstand the financial panic of 1896. He moved to Detroit and got under way again. Early in his career there he received an order from a man he did not know, to turn out a large number of labels bearing only the name of the new customer. Drebes was dubious about the credit of the customer and made inquiries about him. It was hard to get information as few people knew anything about the man who wanted the labels. But Drebes took a chance, changed the design of the one word, sketched it in pen and ink and filled the order. The one word was "Ford" and the Drebes sketch was the same as you see now on every Ford car, on every Ford sign and on all the Ford printed matter. In later years there was nothing unusual about an order to Drebes to supply Ford with four million letterheads. The now retired lithographer—his business still continues—told me the Lucky Strike cigarette people keep presses running all the time to supply them with the lithographed containers in which they pack their wares.

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**H**UMPHREY BOGART'S chilling performance as a killer in *Dead End* has convinced me more than ever that he occasionally should play sympathetic parts. Even through his villainy there shines the quality that lends sincerity to sympathetic roles.

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**W**ENT early to a preview to sit through *Captains Courageous* again. Have done that frequently to get a second glimpse of pictures I liked when I saw them in preview, and invariably I have been impressed more by the second view than the first. It may be because the first time I am a reviewer at work and the second time just a picture fan looking for entertainment; but, in any event, I do not believe any of us can get all the fine points of a good picture if we see it but once. A SPECTATOR reader, sitting behind me on my second visit to *Captains*, tapped me on the shoulder and whispered, "Is that dialogue quiet enough to suit you?" Not until then did I become conscious that the players on the screen were shouting their lines at the tops of their voices, something the SPECTATOR has been condemning ever since the screen went talkie. But I had been unconscious of it because in this picture it was necessary, the men on the fishing boat having to compete with the wind and waves to make themselves heard. Anything that has a legitimate place in a screen creation, that is included by the demands of the creation itself, cannot prove an annoyance to an audience. Loud dialogue ceases to be an irritant when it becomes necessary. And ordinary conversational tones can annoy under certain conditions. An example: Two people are being taken to jail on a misdemeanor charge; they are sitting between two officers; in a close-up which eliminates the officers, one of the prisoners remarks to the

other, "Wouldn't those dicks have a fit if they knew we were the guys who pulled off the Osborne jewel robbery?" The speech is made in a low tone, but not too low to be heard by the officers crowded into the car seat with them. Such direction is so absurd that it is as irritating as unnecessary shouting.

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**N**OAH BEERY is back in town. An excellent actor, Noah served Hollywood pictures long and faithfully, his reward being his disappearance from the screen while producers put others in parts he could play better. He went to England and played in enough pictures over there to become a favorite with British audiences. As American producers are striving now to curry favor with British exhibitors, a step in that direction would be to send their friend Noah back to them in pictures made here.

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**M**ENTAL MEANDERINGS: Charlie Chaplin and I practiced polo together some years ago; my showing was poor because of my inability to find a mallet with a handle long enough to reach from my pony to the ball. . . . My favorite pipe finally has given out; Mrs. Spectator opined it was suffocated by its own odor. . . . On recent motor trip we obeyed the thumb of a pleasant boy, whom we carried twenty miles; told us he would thumb his way back home; had a forty-mile ride every morning. . . . Airplane baggage has demonstrated it no longer is necessary to carry our duds around in miniature fortifications. . . . Predictions: won't be long before most women cease wearing hats; television will not affect motion pictures even remotely; swing music soon will give way to less noisy and more musical music. . . . Never give much thought to food, but can go for codfish cakes at the Brown Derby, smothered chicken at the Samarkand and fried filets of clams at Morro Beach Inn. . . . You are not taking your film career seriously if you do not attend the Film Society showings at the Filmarte every Tuesday evening. . . . Would like to see Madge Kennedy and Una Merkel in good parts in the same picture; two of my charming friends. . . . My sunflower is so high and its blossom so enormous, I am afraid it is going to crash down on me some time as I cut the flowers in its vicinity. . . . Two birds in the tree above me are distracting my attention from my writing by a devil of a fight they are carrying on. . . . *London Era*, anent Elaine Barrie's *How to Undress Before Your Husband*, suggests going to bed before he gets home. . . . My thanks to Sam Goldwyn for a copy of the book, *Hurricane*; and to Marc Lachman for one of *The Road Back*. . . . Spinach patch in our flower garden getting out of bounds; horning its way in among the asters. . . . When Freddie, the spaniel, feels he wants a bath, he lies under a stationary tub until I pick him up and splash him into the suds; when Mrs. Spectator feels Bo Peep, the Pekinese, needs one, she—Bo Peep, I mean—crawls under a bed. . . . Trotting horses in newsreels thrill me. . . . One thing I noticed in recent visit to Carmel was that eyebrows of all the women were on straight. . . . If the SPECTATOR were an illustrated magazine it never would publish a photograph of two people shaking hands while looking at the camera, or two people kissing. . . . By the way, do you want any spinach?

## Some Late Previews

### Great Human Document

THAT CERTAIN WOMAN, Warners. Executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Robert Lord; director, Edmund Goulding; story and screen play, Edmund Goulding; photographer, Ernest Haller; music, Max Steiner; film editor, Jack Killifer; assistant director, Chuck Hanson. Cast: Bette Davis, Henry Fonda, Ian Hunter, Anita Louise, Donald Crisp, Hugh O'Connell, Katherine Alexander, Mary Phillips, Minor Watson, Ben Weldon, Sidney Toler, Charles Trowbridge, Norman Willis, Herbert Rawlinson, Tim Henning, Dwane Day.

**T**HIS one reminds us that Eddie Goulding is a genius. His pictures come rarely and he has made his full quota of poor ones, but he never made one entirely devoid of a touch of genius. *That Certain Woman* takes its place among the outstanding achievements of the talking era, and it is all Goulding. He put his brain into the writing of the story and screen play, then instilled his emotions in the people selected to supply the flesh and blood for the characters he had created. In his story he was dealing with affairs which concerned a prominent lawyer, his secretary, a nice young man, and others—people going their several ways, living their lives—and he puts us into intimate contact with them, allows us to overhear even their whispered confidences, to look into their eyes and see there what is in their hearts. He does not entertain us with actresses and actors playing their parts.

*That Certain Woman* is one of the most engrossing social dramas ever presented on the screen. The big theatre in which it was shown in preview was crowded with friends of the producers and admirers of those appearing in the cast, yet not once during the showing was there even a ripple of applause. Ordinarily that would be a reflection on the picture's merits. But not in this instance. It was a tribute to Goulding's genius. In real life we do not applaud a mother's exhibition of grief, a father's solicitude for his son, a lover's tenderness towards his sweetheart. We do not applaud Bette Davis when she tenderly handles the toys of the little son she had surrendered to his father; we are not looking at the actress playing a part, but at a grieving mother. We are viewing life, not acting.

**A**ND that is what makes *That Certain Woman* a notable film production. And the element responsible chiefly for the naturalness which makes it notable is Goulding's direction of the dialogue. Ever since we have had talkies, the SPECTATOR has pleaded with directors to make their players talk like the people they play, to make screen dialogue a series of intimate conversations, to let the microphone project the voices. But there are not a half dozen directors in Hollywood who understand their medium sufficiently to realize the importance of such dialogue treatment. For the sincerity intimate conversations would give their productions, they substitute the artificiality of stage diction, they bid their audience remain aloof and listen to the lines projected to them. Goulding draws his audience into immediate contact with his characters and permits it to overhear what is not intended for its ears.

He employs other devices, no doubt unconsciously, to lend sincerity to his picture. He did not strive for literary excellence when he wrote his speeches. In places lines are broken, speeches left unfinished, but never their meanings left obscure. And he carries the lack of meticulous precision into his direction of action. Bette Davis types a letter, walks away from her typewriter, returns to it for the envelope she had forgotten. In real life people do forget little things like envelopes, but never on the screen. I can imagine what would have happened on most sets: "Let's shoot it again—and, Bette, this time remember to pick up the envelope right after you pull the paper out of the typewriter." Until human beings become perfect machines, Goulding's technique will be preferable.

**G**OULDING'S disregard of nonessentials is a delightful feature of his production. We never see the letter Bette writes; it is not necessary that we should, as the situation tells us what it must have contained. We are not told if Bette has parents, brothers or sisters. To her apartment comes a man looking for Ian Hunter. His name and his relationship to other characters are not established because it is not necessary they should be. Goulding interests us in the significance of what he does, and that is all the story value the man has. All through the picture is displayed the same indifference to film conventions, and that, in a large measure, is responsible for the fact that *That Certain Woman* is one of the truest human documents the screen ever has presented.

With such a story and such direction only perfect performances could result. Their very naturalness leaves me wondering what to say about them. In the entire picture there is not one suggestion of acting. Always the SPECTATOR has contended the screen is not an acting art, using the word in the meaning the stage has given it—the art of projecting emotions to an audience. The stage player's chief concern must be his audience; the screen player has no audience, yet ninety-nine of our directors constantly have their characters play to this non-existent audience. Goulding does not. Bette Davis, Henry Fonda, Ian Hunter, Anita Louise, Donald Crisp, Hugh O'Connell, Mary Phillips and others in the cast are just people, each reacting with complete naturalness to the situations in which he or she is involved and never for a moment endeavoring to project anything to anybody "out front."

**T**O my mind, the story has one weakness. Towards the end Bette relinquishes her son voluntarily to his father. I can see no reason for it. Generally a push-over for any tearful scene, Bette's sacrifice left me cold for I could interpret it only as mechanically contrived to permit her to display more of her wares. Rustling and sniffing throughout the audience indicated a different view. The sequence seemed to be profoundly moving to those who viewed it. But I believe a sounder ending would have been to clean-up Donald Crisp's disagreeable characterization as Fonda's father by making him responsible for reuniting the young lovers. That would have removed the one technical fault in the story—the failure satisfactorily to wind up Crisp's performance.

All those who had to do with the physical features of *That Certain Woman* are to be commended. Robert Lord, for whose picture mind I have utmost respect, was associate producer. Max Parker's sets match well the mood of the story and Ernest Haller's photography is excellent.

As I glance back over my review I find I failed to mention one of the most important members of the cast. Dwane Day is, I should guess, about four years old, and plays his part so well I let him take the final bow before we ring the curtain down on his picture and take up the next I saw.

### Sam's Magnificent Mistake

DEAD END, Samuel Goldwyn production for United Artists release. Associate producer, Merritt Hulburd; directed by William Wyler; starring Sylvia Sidney and Joel McCrea; featuring Humphrey Bogart, Wendy Barrie, Claire Trevor and Allen Jenkins; screen play by Lillian Hellman; from the play by Sidney Kingsley, as produced by Norman Bel Geddes; art director, Richard Day; musical director, Alfred Newman; camera, Gredd Toland; costumes, Omar Kiam; film editor, Daniel Mandell; sound, Frank Maher; set decorations, Julia Heron; assistant director, Eddie Bernoudy. Cast: Marjorie Main, Billy Halop, Huntz Hall, Bobby Jordan, Leo B. Gorcey, Gabriel Dell, Bernard Punsly, Charles Peck, Minor Watson, Charles Halton, James Burke, Ward Bond, Elisabeth Risdon, Esther Dale, George Humbert and Marcelle Corday.

**M**AIN titles tell us in sequence that SAMUEL GOLDWYN (Gigantic letters) presents *Dead End*. . . . A SAMUEL GOLDWYN production. . . . Produced by SAMUEL GOLDWYN, by which time we feel convinced that Sam must have had something to do with the picture, and we are equally sure the recent publicity which he has received has gone to his head. The opening title in which his name is so big there is little room on the screen for "presents," is about tops in self-publicity. Sam should get wise to the fact that the publicity he has been getting had advertising value because it was not the work of his press agents, and that its effect will be lessened by his own exploitation of his name.

And the picture itself partakes somewhat of the same quality. It is Sam's most magnificent mistake. Strikingly mounted, brilliantly written, superbly directed, beautifully acted, it still comes far short of satisfactory screen entertainment. Hollywood's widespread obsession that because a play was a success on the stage a film version must become a success on the screen, was Sam's undoing. The technical merits of *Dead End* as a picture demonstrates the truth of the SPECTATOR's ten-year-old contention that there is no relation between the stage and the screen. I can quite understand why the play was a success in New York. There the slum problem exists and on the stage good acting in itself is entertaining.

**A**PLAY, well presented and well acted, does not have to maintain the uninterrupted continuity a motion picture must sustain if it is to be a success. I have neither seen nor read the play, but I judge from the picture it is a series of impressionistic scenes depicting slum life and making no attempt to follow one line of thought. In the theatre there is a pause after each scene and a longer one between acts, all mechanical breaks which make story

continuity less important as an entertainment factor than the quality of the acting. The reason for the domination of the screen over the stage to the point of threatening its very existence, is the screen's status as a purely story-telling medium to which acting is of value only as a story element and not as an isolated artistic contribution.

It will be seen, then, that the mind we take to the theatre in no way resembles the mind we take to the picture house. We select our stage entertainment with discretion; we go to pictures as a matter of habit. We go to both to see our favorite players, but we go to the theatre to see them act and to the picture house because we like the kind of stories they appear in.

If you are play-conscious, by all means see *Dead End*. It is a beautifully accomplished job, one of the finest technical feats to the credit of the screen. I enjoyed every moment of it even while lamenting its lack of box-office value and in spite of its most unpleasant atmosphere.

**T**HE fact that a play is a success in New York means nothing west of the Hudson, even though Hollywood spends millions of dollars each year on a different assumption. The Goldwyn name is beginning to mean something at the box-office and will be responsible for some of the attendance at houses showing *Dead End*. Every picture can count on thirty million patrons in this country who seek screen entertainment as a matter of habit. It is their word-of-mouth advertising which determines the fate of a picture. This great army is not composed of the discriminating type, and its report on *Dead End* will not help the box-office. Those attracted by the Goldwyn name will be disappointed, which will lessen the box-office returns on Sam's subsequent pictures until *Dead End* is forgotten.

Propaganda for slum clearance is not motion picture box-office. If I understand the picture correctly, *Dead End* is nothing but such propaganda. It presents us with a series of artistically etched incidents of slum life which are not tied together and brought to a common ending point. At no time during its running does the picture make clear what it is about. The slums are shown on the edge of a fashionable residential district and fashionable people come into the action without revealing why. There is a group of ragamuffin boys who give extraordinarily meritorious performances which you will admire even while trying to fit them into what is going on.

**H**UMPHREY BOGART is shown as a product of the slums, a gangster with seven murders to his credit. That would serve as a crushing indictment of slum life if it were not for the presence of Joel McCrea, born and brought up in the same slums to become an upright and brave young man whose sterling character indicates slums are not wholly bad. Sylvia Sidney also does not allow the seamy atmosphere in which she was raised to lower her moral standard or check her physical development. So you will see it is all very confusing. But, as I have said, no picture has given us a collection of finer performances, a notable feature of which is the fact that Allen Jenkins reads his dialogue in a conversational tone that makes it

convincing. I have criticized him severely for shouting all his lines and am glad to see he has reformed.

Willie Wyler's direction is brilliant. Not in the entire picture is there evidence of one weak spot. To the Goldwyn technical staff goes credit for a fine piece of work in creating the locale of the story. Gregg Toland's photography is outstanding, his camera well sustaining the mood of scenes and bringing to the screen many shots of great artistic merit. Alfred Newman's music also is a big contribution to the production.

*Dead End* in all its technical aspects is as well done as *Stella Dallas*, the Goldwyn picture reviewed in the previous SPECTATOR. Both of them reflect credit on Merritt Hulburd, associate producer, but they differ vastly in emotional appeal. You will weep when you view *Stella Dallas* and wonder as you view *Dead End*.

## Paramount At Its Best

ARTISTS AND MODELS, Paramount picture and release. Producer, Lewis E. Gensler; director, Raoul Walsh; stars Jack Benny, Ida Lupino, Richard Arlen, Gail Patrick, Ben Blue and July Canova; screen play by Walter De Leon and Francis Martin; adaptation by Eve Greene and Harlan Ware; based on story by Sig Herzig and Gene Thackrey; film editor, Alma Ruth Macrorie; art directors, Hans Dreier and Robert Usher; sound, Harold Lewis and Louis Mesenkop; interior decorations by A. E. Freudeman; photographed by Victor Milner, special effects by Gordon Jennings; musical numbers staged by LeRoy Prinz; costumes by Travis Banton; musical direction by Boris Morros; musical advisor, Phil Boutelje; songs by Leo Robin and Frederick Hollander, Ted Koehler and Harold Arlen, Ted Koehler and Victor Young, Ted Koehler and Burton Lane, the Yacht Club Boys and Ted Koehler. Cast: The Yacht Club Boys, Cecil Cunningham, Donald Meek, Hedda Hopper, Kathryn Kay, Mary Shepherd, Gloria Wheeden, specialties by Martha Raye, Andre Kostelanetz and his orchestra, Russell Patterson's Personetts, Connie Boswell, Louis Armstrong, July, Anne and Zeke Canova, Peter Arno, McClelland Barclay, Arthur William Brown, Rube Goldberg, John LaGatta, Russell Patterson, Sandra Storme.

UP to the moment of writing this review, I would rate *Artists and Models* as the best picture of the sort I ever saw. I put in the time qualification as things are happening so rapidly that the next picture I see may put it all over this most creditable Paramount production.

I do not know how to classify *Artists and Models*. It is not a musical of the *Firefly* variety, nor is it an hilarious film such as we get from the Marx or Ritz brothers. It is an exceedingly clever comedy with much good music, a most capable cast and many beautiful girls, and of all these the cleverness is the most outstanding. The DeLeon-Martin-Greene-Ware-Herzig-Thackery — one, two, three, four, five, six; I have them all — story is a mass production with more cohesiveness than we usually find in pictures of the sort. We do not lose sight of it in the parade of specialties, some of which are of great beauty and all of which are highly entertaining. It is a light story, as befits the company it keeps, and scintillates with amusing situations and humorous dialogue.

One "gag" will give you an idea of the kind of comedy which makes the production laugh provoking. Jack Benny, alone in his office, unknowingly starts his radio as he swings his chair. Behind him a voice booms out: "Stick 'em up! Keep 'em up! Walk over to that corner!" And a lot more blood curdling instructions to which Jack reacts so sincerely that the audience is convulsed with

laughter. It is extremely funny because it so easily could happen in real life.

JACK is an exceedingly large part of the show, revealing himself as a most capable screen actor. I never have met him, but I attribute his success on the radio and the screen to his complete naturalness, his engaging personality lending itself to the intimate exploitation possible to both mediums. He impresses us as being a nice fellow and we like him to the extent of being interested in everything he does. That makes it easy for him to entertain us.

Credit to all those who contribute so much to the picture merely would be a catalogue of the incidents which compose it. There are two romances, Gail Patrick and Benny, Ida Lupino and Dick Arlen, although during the course of the picture both of the girls propose to Jack, the scene in which Gail asks him to become her husband being one of the most amusing and skilfully acted in the production. It is Gail's scene, Jack's contribution consisting mainly of disturbed consternation. Ida proves the wisdom of her casting by giving us a most engaging performance. It is a big part and should earn her a succession of others equally big.

Judy Canova, another recruit from radio, and Ben Blue, one of the better eccentric comedians, provoked many laughs. Cecil Cunningham, Donald Meek and Hedda Hopper also make big contributions. An interesting feature is a scene showing a half dozen leading artists at work sketching Sandra Storme, who is billed as "England's most famous model." She looks as if she might be. Victor Milner's photography is of rare quality.

A FEATURE of *Artists and Models* is the intelligent restraint it displays. Nothing is overdone; in fact we could stand a little more of each of the various features. And the features are spaced in a manner to produce the best results, the film editing of Alma Macrorie being a noteworthy job. The whole job, of course, stands to the credit of Lewis Gensler, producer. Musical variety pictures are following one another with such rapidity, and so much money is being spent on them, that to top all previous ones is an accomplishment of which a producer may well feel proud. Gensler certainly gives other studios a tough mark to shoot at.

Musically the picture has much to commend it to those who like a generous dash of the esthetic in their screen entertainment. All the music is up to the high standard set by the production as a whole, one number, "Whispering in the Dark," being particularly beautiful. Leo Robin and Frederick Hollander provided words and music, LeRoy Prinz the staging, and Connie Boswell and ensemble the singing, the whole being under the direction of Andre Kostelanetz. It prompts the not exceedingly original remark that it alone is worth the price of admission.

To Raoul Walsh goes praise for admirable direction. He starts things off with a bang with an opening song by the Yacht Club Boys, of whose singing no picture yet has given me quite enough, and thereafter the pace is steady, its speed matching always the moods of the vari-



ous scenes. Raoul had many diverse elements to weave into his complete fabric, and it is a tribute to his genius that the production flows along so smoothly.

## Another Paramount Hit

**SOULS AT SEA**, Paramount. Director, Henry Hathaway; story, Ted Lesser; screen play, Grover Jones and Dale Van Every; photographers, Charles Lang and Merritt Gerstad; special effects, Gordon Jennings; original music, W. Frank Harling and Milan Roder; orchestrations, John Leipold; music direction, Boris Morros; film editor, Ellsworth Hoagland; assistant director, Hal Walker. Cast: Gary Cooper, George Raft, Frances Dee, Henry Wilcoxon, Harry Carey, Olympe Bradna, Robert Cummings, Porter Hall, George Zucco, Virginia Weidler, Joseph Schildkraut, Gilbert Emery, Lucien Littlefield, Paul Fix, Tully Marshall, Monte Blue, Stanley Fields.

**T**HE SPECTATOR's contention always has been that the story is not the matter of first importance. In *Souls at Sea* it takes its place a long way after the visually impressive production given it by Paramount and the series of fine performances which Director Henry Hathaway gets from all the members of the cast. The picture is excellent entertainment, one of those you owe it to yourself to see. No direction could be better than Hathaway gives it. Henry may recall some of the things the SPECTATOR said about his ability some years ago when he rapidly was turning out unimportant pictures which harrowed his feelings by the scant opportunities they gave him to express himself as he longed to do. The predictions of the SPECTATOR at that time have been realized abundantly in his late productions and never more emphatically than in *Souls at Sea*. It is a beautiful job of direction.

That the best screen performances must come from players unhampered by stage training, another old SPECTATOR tradition, is demonstrated again in the work of Gary Cooper, George Raft, Frances Dee and Olympe Bradna, whose technique is solely that of the screen. They, with Henry Wilcoxon and George Zucco, carry the burden of the story, and there is not a flaw in the four performances. Stage performances are more showy on the screen than screen performances, attracting attention to themselves by their departure from complete naturalness in voice and gesture, whereas the perfect screen characterization, by virtue of its lack of the suggestion of acting, merges into the pattern of the picture so harmoniously its value as an individual element seldom is given full valuation. From Gary Cooper we have become so used to getting perfect characterizations that we always take him for granted as being the person he plays and are not liable to recognize his rating as a screen actor. In *Souls at Sea* Gary is truly great, his quiet, sincere, restrained performance being the main strength of the picture.

**P**ERHAPS not as a surprise, but certainly as a revelation, is George Raft's mastery of a sympathetic role unlike any other in which he has appeared. Here we have him, not as the sleek hooper or the oiled-hair Eastside boy, but as an ingenuous, likeable and untutored roamer of the seas whose god is Gary and whose heart becomes Olympe Bradna's. In every phase of the characterization

George is completely at home. He no longer is a specialist; he is a leading man with inherent sympathetic appeal, with ability to put tenderness into tender scenes, humor into comedy and bluster into bravado. I hope he never again will have to compete for attention with the glitter of his hair oil.

As the shy, carefully reared English girl of the period of the story, Frances Dee proves perfect casting. Physically a gorgeous creature, there is enough intelligence behind her beautiful eyes to make them the mirror of her emotions, and making emotions visual is nine-tenths of a screen performance. I hope the important parts she has to play at home as wife of Joel McCrea and mother of her children, will not be permitted to deny the public her more frequent appearances on the screen. The little Bradna girl is a comer. I did not see the one other picture in which she has appeared, but her *Souls at Sea* performance is quite enough to warrant the prediction of a successful career for her.

**G**EORGE ZUCCO is another who impresses, as does Henry Wilcoxon's consistent villainy. Porter Hall, Gilbert Emery and Harry Carey are others who stand out. Joe Schildkraut apparently got mixed up by mistake with the *Souls at Sea* cast, his role having about as much to do with the story as it would have with a big league ball game. But Joe makes us notice it. We get a glimpse also of a young fellow who is destined to get somewhere—Robert Cummings, one of tomorrow's outstanding dramatic actors.

William LeBaron, producer, faced a big task in merging all the physical elements into such a completely satisfactory whole. His staff did yeoman service. Particularly fortunate was he in his choice of cameramen, the photography of Charles Lang and Merritt Gerstad being responsible for many shots of great beauty. The special photographic effects by Gordon Jennings also play a large part in the success of the production. Leo Robin and Ralph Rainger contribute a pair of songs which come naturally into the story and entertainment without slowing its progress, and which also match the moods of the scenes in which they are presented. That means intelligent screen-music composing.

The writers of the screen play excelled themselves in developing the characterization for Gary Cooper. He is a poetry-loving adventurer and the snatches of poetic writing which he weaves into his dialogue bear tribute to the literary tastes of Grover Jones and Dale Van Every.

## Workmanlike Little Job

**FLIGHT FROM GLORY**, RKO. Producer, Robert Sisk; director, Lew Landers; original, Robert D. Andrews; screen play, David Silverstein and John Twist; photographer, Nicholas Musuraca; special effects, Vernon L. Walker; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate, Foild M. Gray; film editor, Harry Markor; assistant director, Robert Barnes. Cast: Chester Morris, Whitney Bourne, Onslow Stevens, Van Heflin, Richard Lane, Paul Guilfoyle, Solly Ward, Douglas Walton, Walter Miller, Rita LaRoy, Pasha Khan.

**A**FTER seeing a half-dozen million dollar productions, one is in just the right mood to enjoy a picture like this. Owing to the superior direction given it by Lew Landers, it has as its chief asset a total lack of those annoying little things—unbelievable incidents, story diverg-



good cast, even if you will have difficulty in accepting as English people those who play the English parts, and will wonder how it happens, that all the Spanish army officers and men speak English, some with accents and some without. The direction of George Marshall is really excellent, the weaknesses of the picture being of a nature which direction could not overcome.

Borrah Minevitch and his gang repeat the clowning they did in *One In a Million*, and spoil what could have been some more of their entertaining music. They are overlooking a good bet when they try to make their clowning carry their music. If they would reverse things, they could continue in pictures, but one more performance like that in *Love Under Fire* will about wash them up.

Don Ameche interests me. Good looking, a good singer, good actor, he yet lacks that something which makes good leading men of players who possess the same qualifications in a lesser degree. Whatever warmth may be latent in his personality does not seem to be able to break through the perfection of his acting technique. Loretta Young is both capable and lovely as the heroine. Harold Huber, whom I have seen in small parts in many pictures and whose work I always have liked, steps to the front in this one and provides it with its most outstanding performance. E. E. Clive also is excellent as an amusingly inebriated sea captain.

## Its Hero Is a Villain

**BACK IN CIRCULATION**, a Cosmopolitan production, a First National Picture. Executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Sam Bischoff; screen play by Warren Duff; from a Cosmopolitan Magazine story by Adela Rogers St. Johns; directed by Ray Enright; assistant director, Jesse Hibbs; photography by Arthur Todd, A.S.C.; dialogue director, Jo Graham; film editor, Clarence Kolster; art director, Hugh Reticker; sound by Charles Lang; gowns by Howard Shoup; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein. Cast: Pat O'Brien, Joan Blondell, Margaret Lindsay, John Litel, Eddie Acuff, Craig Reynolds, George E. Stone, Walter Byron, Ben Welden, Regis Toomey, Raymond Brown, Gordon Hart, Granville Bates, Herbert Rawlinson, Spencer Charters.

**WHEN** I became old enough to wonder where I came from, I was told my father had found me in the pi-box in the shop in which he published the country weekly he owned when I made my advent. Although it has nothing to do with the point I am about to make, I might as well go ahead and tell you that a pi-box was a receptacle into which type that got mixed up was thrown, later to be sorted out and put in proper places. Anyway, the incident of my original discovery, coupled with the fact of

my grey hair, will give you some idea of how long I have been in the newspaper business without encountering a newspaperman like the one Pat O'Brien plays in *Back In Circulation*. And by that I do not mean that Pat gives a poor performance. It means that I do not believe his characterization is the sort he should have given.

And even if a city editor like Pat's is to be found in every newspaper office I still would protest against one of them being the model for a screen characterization. Pat plays a snarling, crabbed, dead pan slave driver with an unmodulated voice, and plays it so consistently and capably that he becomes a positive nuisance before the picture is half over. We view pictures with the idea of being entertained and an unentertaining leading man cannot entertain us. *Back In Circulation* would have been a much more pleasant picture if Pat had been permitted to be more pleasant and more believable. He is the hero of the tale purely by virtue of the casting and gives a first class performance as a villain.

**BUT** a saving grace is the heroine of Joan Blondell. She not only is delightful personally, but plays her part with zest and intelligence, giving a performance as thoroughly satisfactory as one could wish for. Margaret Lindsay has a dramatic role which she plays with expression and understanding. It seems to me that she is about ready to undertake a really big part strong in emotional values. John Litel is excellent as are also Craig Reynolds, George E. Stone and Walter Byron. There is no weak spot in any of the minor roles. Regis Toomey makes a few appearances. No player on the screen possesses a more engaging personality and he long since has demonstrated his acting ability, yet we rarely see him in important pictures. Herbert Rawlinson, talented, handsome, also is seen briefly in this picture. The consistent overlooking of such players as Toomey and Rawlinson—there are scores more—is one of the strange things the picture industry does.

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S A M A R K A N D  
SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA

**HUGO NORBECK, Manager**

Warren Duff's screen play capably knits the story incidents together, and Ray Enright presents them with thoroughly capable direction. Sam Bischoff saw to it that the picture had a good production. If whoever was responsible for making my friend Pat such a disagreeable hero will rise up and admit it, I will bawl him out quite merrily.

**B**EING so firmly of the opinion that color belongs on the screen only in factual films—newsreels, travelogues, etc.—and feeling that one with such a conviction should not review a picture in which color photography is a principal element, I deputized Bert Harlen to cover the preview of Walter Wanger's *Vogues of 1938*. His review will be found below.

## Reviews by Bert Harlen

### Rare Use of Color

WALTER WANGER'S *VOGUES OF 1938*, United Artists release of Walter Wanger production. Producer, Walter Wanger; director, Irving Cummings; stars Warner Baxter and Joan Bennett; original screen play by Bella and Samuel Spewack; film editors, Otho Lovering and Dorothy Spencer; art director, Alexander Toluboff; sound, Paul Neal; technicolor photography, Ray Rennahan; technicolor color director, Natalie Kalmus; songs by Lew Brown, Sammy Fain, Frank Loesser, Manning Sherwin, Louis Alter and Paul F. Webster. Cast: Helen Vinson, Mischa Auer, Alan Mowbray, Jerome Cowan, Alma Kruger, Marjorie Gateson, Dorothy McNulty, Polly Rowles, Marla Shelton, Hedda Hopper, Georgie Tapps, Virginia Verrill, Fred Lawrence, Gloria Gilbert, Olympic Trio, Wiere Brothers, Rocco and Saulter, The Four Hot Shots, Victor Young and his orchestra.

**W**ALTER WANGER'S *Vogues of 1938*, in addition to making the most sensational use of color yet to be seen on the screen, has the glamor and punch of a first-rate Broadway musical. Beauteous models, parading in stunning gowns, luxurious furs, and a million dollars worth of jewels (assertedly), sterling entertainers, and a good cast combine to make a show that should have wide appeal. The feminine contingent, of course, will be most attracted by the fashions displayed, but on the other hand, gentlemen will find the advertising models assembled—"the most photographed girls in the world"—an extremely pleasant eye-full.

Theatre goes with an interest in the progress of the cinema will find in Irving Cummings' film some of the

finest color photography that has come out of Hollywood, for which special credit should go to Ray Rennahan, cinematographer; Natalie Kalmus, color director, and Alexander Toluboff, art director. An early panoramic shot of the New York sky line at dawn was fairly breathtaking and drew enthusiastic applause from a distinguished preview audience. In it there are but two predominating colors, the pale blue of the sky and the warm yellowish brown of the tall buildings glowing in the sunlight. But the effect is exhilarating. One can seemingly breathe the wine-like morning air of Manhattan, and sense the drama of a great turbulent metropolis awakening.

**A**NOTHER beautiful shot is of a boulevard lined with trees of fresh green, set off by the duller colors of buildings and the street. In still another scene of rich feeling a New York street at early morning is depicted, done almost entirely in a greenish blue. These scenes, it will be noted, are done in simple, soft and harmonious colors. No attempt is made to present details, or to show authentically objects in the scene which are likely to be of a contrasting color. The stumbling block of so much color photography lies in a penchant producers have for authenticity. The foregoing scenes are effective because they suggest.

The most striking use of color, however, occurs in a dance sequence featuring a group of negro dancers, whose writhing and supposedly tortured figures lie on a glass floor, through which floods a fiery red, suggesting the flames of hell, the background remaining a sombre brown or black. The red is alternated with blue. It is an effect utterly artificial, but it is bizarre and artistic. It seems to me that color photography, at least in its present stage of development, will be put to the best usage through not trying to reproduce nature in the sense that black and white photography does, but in creating beautiful patterns of color, on the one hand, and on the other hand, merely suggesting nature when natural scenes are portrayed, allowing the imagination of the audience to function a bit. In drawing and painting

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some splendid work is done in only two colors, or indeed in black and white and a single color. Even when painting nature in a representative way a good artist limits himself to colors which are harmonious. Why not have the motion picture do its painting only with colors which it can reproduce the best and combine the most harmoniously?

**G**OWNS and furs in the picture, which Omar Kiam and Irene have played a prominent part in assembling, make pleasing studies when their colors blend harmoniously. Too frequently, however, certain shades of bright green or red are used in an ensemble which overbalance the other colors in the shot. Some of these effects, I concede, are dazzling in a flamboyant sort of way, but they also emphasize the limitations of the Technicolor process, and their garishness detracts from the tone and spirit of the color work throughout the picture. The least impressive of the shots in the film were those concerned with the action of the principal characters. There is no denying that color still masks facial expression, and that objects of a contrasting color in a scene can easily draw attention from what the characters are saying or doing. And by the by, leading men should keep a supply of nice white wing collars on hand when making color pictures. In one scene Warner Baxter's wing collar is very noticeably smeared with some of Max Factor's make-up.

Well—there are intricacies of the Technicolor process that I don't understand, but I do know that all the colors and shades in a scene being shot do not have to go onto the film. The lovely garden scene in *A Day at the Races*, done in a sepia tone, with egg-shell highlights and light blue shadows, is an instance of what can be done in selecting colors. Some day some enterprising fellow is going to make a color picture in which no attempt is made to rival nature, but in which colors are used to paint with, to create the greatest emotional effect that can be got from the materials at hand; and then we shall really see something.

**T**HE screen play by Bella and Samuel Spewack, though a make-shift affair, has some smart dialogue and is satisfactory as a thread upon which to string the musical numbers and the parade of fashion. The proceedings are enhanced greatly by the musical score of Boris Morros.

Joan Bennet plays with her customary easy grace, and holds her own with the best of the models. Warner Baxter makes convincing a not inherently convincing role, and Mischa Auer is at his best, playing in his new comedy style. Helen Vinson is pretty, capable, and wears the largest single gem, a 130-carat blue topaz. Jerome Cowan

**TONY MARTINELLI**  
Film Editor  
Republic Studios

is amusing, and a neat bit of characterization is contributed by Alma Kruger. Alan Mowbray and Marjorie Gateson are among others in the cast doing competent work.

A distinctive array of entertainers has been assembled, including Georgie Tapps, doing a tap-ballet routine, the unique Wiere Brothers from Vienna, the human top Gloria Gilbert, and Virginia Verrill, who thoroughly conveys her sorrow singing "That Old Feeling."

## Excels In Gayety

**IT'S ALL YOURS**, Columbia. Producer, William Perlberg; director, Elliott Nugent; screenplay, Mary C. McCall Jr.; original, Adelaide Heilbron; photographer, Henry Freulich; film editor, Gene Havlick; art director, Stephen Goosson; musical director, Morris Stoloff; assistant director, Cliff Broughton. Cast: Madeleine Carroll, Francis Lederer, Mischa Auer, Grace Bradley, Victor Kilian, George McKay, Charles Waldron, J. C. Nugent, Richard Carle, Arthur Hoyt, Franklin Pangborn.

**A** GOOD comedy spirit is the distinguishing feature of *It's All Yours*, through which Madeleine Carroll, Francis Lederer, and Mischa Auer romp with a keen appreciation of nonsense. Not the least of the nonsense in the film is the story itself, which is an obviously fabricated affair. According to the yarn, upon the death of a certain wealthy man his beautiful secretary, in love with the old fellow's profligate but charming nephew, though not given a tumble by him, conspires with the family attorney to pretend that she, rather than the nephew, inherits her employer's fortune.

Anyone but an imbecile could get to the bottom of the hoax with small investigation. The resulting situations are good, however, and they are dressed up in such merry dialogue by the authors, Adelaide Heilbron, doing the original story, and Mary C. McCall, Jr., writing the screen play, that the film turns out to be an enjoyable



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feature. Elliot Nugent has directed the whole proceedings with his tongue in his cheek, making the best of the opportunities for comedy, which is exactly what he should have done.

**R**AVISHINGLY lovely is the rather banal but perfectly true compliment that must be paid Madeleine Carroll. In no other picture has her beauty been seen to such advantage, for which some credit is due Kalloch, designer of her gowns, and Henry Freulich, cinematographer. Her comedy situations Miss Carroll handles with esprit.

Francis Lederer is ingratiating, as usual, and sustains his reputation of being a very good actor in both ranting and quieter moments. It is to Mischa Auer, however, that the picture will probably mean the most as far as advancement in public favor is concerned. Appearing as the candid Baron Rene de Montigny, to whom marrying heiresses is a business pure and simple, his effete gestures and naive eyeball rolling drew many laughs. His demonstration at a picnic on the technique of a toreador, using a phlegmatic old cow for an antagonist, is capital.

Grace Bradley gives a spritely and amusing account of a scatter-brained actress, though some of her scenes would have profited by being less accentuated. J. C. Nugent, the ever-amusing Richard Carle, and Charles Waldron also do good work.

## Is America Aspiring?

CHARLEY CHAN ON BROADWAY, 20th Century-Fox. Associate producer, John Stone; director, Eugene Forde; screen play, Charles Belden and Jerry Cady; original, Art Arthur, Robert Ellis and Helen Logan; based on character by Earl Derr Biggers; photographer, Harry Jackson; music director, Samuel Kaylin; assistant director, Samuel Schneider. Cast: Warner Oland, Keye Luke, Joan Marsh, J. Edward Bromberg, Douglas Fowley, Harold Huber, Donald Wood, Louise Henry, Joan Woodbury, Leon Ames, Marc Lawrence, Tashia Mori, Charles Williams, Eugene Borden.

**D**EAR old Charlie is still sleuthing, abetted by the ancient wisdom of the Orient. Now it is a murder on the glittering Great White Way that he humbly and courteously undertakes to solve. This, needless to say, he does with the utmost dispatch. The present film is built upon the usual detective yarn formula—button, button, whose got the button?—with suspicion being thrown by every conceivable device upon the wrong persons. That the guilty one in *Charlie Chan on Broadway* turns out to be such an agreeable person, seems too bad, since there are so many obviously dyed-in-the-wool scoundrels who are absolved, but that is the way with detective stories.

Director Eugene Forde has captured much of the hard glitter of Broadway in the picture, which abounds in types, each decisively drawn. The action is fast and staccato throughout the film, and audiences will find it an absorbing melodrama, a good picture of its kind.

Warner Oland has never appeared more oriental or more ingratiating. Keye Luke, No. 1 son, hasn't yet lost a certain awkwardness in his playing, particularly in the movement of his arms, but the naivete, aspiration and wholesomeness he manifests make him likeable. Harold Huber contributes a good deal to the show, evidencing

an unsuspected flair for comedy. J. Edward Bromberg is excellent as an editor, and Donald Wood gives a smooth performance as a reporter. Joan Marsh, Louise Henry and Joan Woodbury were among those doing competent work.

**T**HE reasons for the continued appeal of Charlie Chan to the American public is interesting to speculate upon. His efficiency and unfailing resourcefulness, of course, would tend to make of him a hero. But there is evidently an attraction about the character which lies beyond these attributes. Could the appeal of the profoundly wise, urbane Chan indicate an awakening desire in our people for some of the qualities which an older civilization affords, a revolt against the "sound and fury" of our own, the first fumbling gestures of a reaching out for wisdom and surety and tranquility of mind? All this sounds rather high flown to be applied to Chan, as familiar and popular on Main Street as on Broadway. Still, I wonder—. At any rate, I believe the publicity department at Twentieth Century-Fox is overlooking an opportunity in not publishing a book devoted to the sayings of Charlie Chan.

## Ramon Novarro Returns

THE SHEIK STEPS OUT, Republic picture and release. Associate producer Herman Schlom; directed by Irving Pichel; starring Ramon Novarro; original story and screen play by Adele Buffington; additional dialogue by Gordon Kahn; photographed by Jack Marta; supervising editor, Murray Seldeen; film editor, Ernest Nims; musical direction by Alberto Colombo; sound engineer, Terry Kellum; costumes by Eloise; songs by Felix Bernard, Winston Tharp, Alberto Colombo and Elsie Janis. Supporting cast: Lola Lane, Gene Lockhart, Kathleen Burke, Stanley Fields, Billy Bevan, Charlotte Treadway, Robert Coote, Leonid Kinskey, Georges Renavent, Jamiel Hasson, C. Montague Shaw, George Sorel.

**T**HE only significant thing about this picture is that it presents Ramon Novarro again to the public, after an absence of some years. Despite the fact that *The Sheik Steps Out* is a far from wisely chosen vehicle for his return, Novarro still manages to impress with his personal charm and the vitality in his acting. The actor looks in the pink of physical condition, and the boyishness of mien, formerly so characteristic of him, is yet in evidence.

Where the story fails is in being produced a decade too late. It should have been a silent picture, where the images before us, accompanied only by music, would have

**MARY C. McCALL, JR.**  
Now Writing for  
Major Pictures

left the imagination free to supply many details of what the actors said and thought. Then we would have accepted a world of fancy such as is here portrayed, wherein a glamorous sheik in flowing robes lures a pretty white girl to his thick-carpeted, luxuriously furnished tent in the heart of burning sands. Spoken dialogue, however, in the language of a work-a-day world, somehow divests the romantic yarn of much of its glamor and practically all of its conviction. Moreover, the sands of such dream-world deserts have had plenty of time to grow cold during the past ten years—public thought has altered and there has been increased debunking of everything on the part of the press. In short, we just don't believe in sheiks any more. This one, it is true, turns out to be a Spanish count who has merely inherited the Arabian title, but he is a sheik nevertheless.

**O**F production values there are few. Some of the desert shots have turned out well, especially those of numerous robed horsemen riding the sands, but many of the shots throughout the picture are harsh, and the interior sets are gaudily ornate. Irving Pichel has directed capably, though occasionally his mechanics in the direction of scenes are caught hold of by the camera. When stage technique is used for screen purposes it must be with the greatest discretion. Most of his scenes are smooth, however, and he has seen that characterizations are sharply drawn.

Outstanding in the cast is Gene Lockhart, the American manufacturer of corkscrews and father of a very spoiled daughter. Gruffness, tenderness, and Babbitry are all projected by him with conviction. Lola Lane has a few good comedy moments, but her characterization is unsustained. Sometimes she impresses one as being the spoiled but good-hearted girl she is supposed to be, at other times she seems a hardened gangster's moll. Greater attention to voice and diction might improve Miss Lane's work considerably. Kathleen Burke was pleasantly surprising because of her poise and well modulated voice. Her acid comedy lines are well pointed.

Leonid Kinsky characterizes a comic Arab capitably. I have noted his work in several pictures now, and I think he is definitely an asset to pictures. Charlotte Treadway, remembered with a sort of reverence from the days of the old Morosco stock in Los Angeles, is very amusing as a fluttering aunt. Stanley Fields, Billy Bevan and Georges Renavent were well cast.

## A Drama Yet to Be Told

**HEROES OF THE ALAMO**, Sunset. Producer, Anthony J. Xydias; director, Harry Fraser; screen play, Roby Wentz; photographer, Robert Cline; film editor, Arthur Brooks; assistant director, Jack Corrick. Cast: Earl Hodgins, Bruce Warren, Ruth Findlay, Lane Chandler, Rex Lease, Roger Williams, Lee Valianos, Julian Rivero, Willy Castello, Paul Ellis, Edward Jiel, Sr., Jack Smith, Marilyn Haslett.

**W**HEN I was a little boy in San Antonio, Texas, we lived close to the center of the city where the famous Alamo is situated, and during summer vacation days I often wandered into the old mission. Its several silent, dimly-lit rooms, steeped in the odor of earth, soon took hold of my imagination, and many an hour was spent in

reconstructing from the historically informative placards on its walls the whole grim drama of the American heroes who died to a man, 183 of them, rather than surrender to the besieging Mexicans. Crockett, Travis, Bowie and others impressed themselves on my youthful mind as of the importance of saints, an impression which was contributed to by the fact that streets, telephone exchanges, parks, and various public utilities in the city were named after these men.

It is scarcely to be wondered at, then, that I should react with little enthusiasm to the summary way in which this legend of heroism is recounted in *Heroes of the Alamo*, a Sunset production. Two or three of the characters appear to have dimensions and the breath of life, Austin particularly, but most of them are only approximated, a shortcoming due both to the script and the acting. As far as historical interpretation is concerned, the picture treats of the event with the naivete of a horse opera. Production values are minimized, much of the photography is harsh, and the story movement is frequently choppy. Among the few performances worth mentioning are those of Earl Hodgins, Rex Lease and Julian Rivero.

The picture may have some drawing power in Texas, where, through patriotic ardor, audiences may read into it elements of story and interpretation which are not there. Discriminating Texans, however, will probably resent having the famous legend of their state told so shoddily. There is a great and grim drama in the birth of Texas, but it has not yet been told.

## For Discriminating Fans

**MASQUERADE IN VIENNA**. Produced by Willie Forst in Vienna, Austria; released in America by George Kraska; scenario by Walter Reisch; music by Willi Schmidt-Gentner; played by Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra; voice of Caruso in Rigoletto. Cast: Paula Wessely, Anton Walbrook, Peter Peterson, Hilde von Stolz, Walter Janssen, Olga Tschschowa, Julia Serda, Hans Moser.

**A** CONTINENTAL flavor that is captivating, subtle direction, flawless acting, and an absorbing tale make of *Masquerade In Vienna* a screen production which every discriminating film fan will want to see. It is Vienna as it was at the turn of the century that is depicted in this film, produced by Willi Forst in Vienna, with an emphasis on the luxury-loving, somewhat jaded upper class. Elaborate balls, gay cafes, the opera, an artist's studio,

**HOWARD EMMETT ROGERS**

**Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer**

and much reference to Chopin and Tschaikowsky help to set the mood for the piece. The story concerns the complications growing out of a sketch made by a prominent artist of Professor Harrandt's pretty but rather silly wife, with only a mask and a muff to conceal herself.

I did not see the remake of this picture, entitled *Escapade*, filmed by MGM in 1935, featuring Luise Rainer and William Powell, but, whatever its excellences, I am certain it could not have had the flavor of this foreign production, which has in its fiber the view points and behavior traits of an older civilization. The only detracting element in the picture is the photography, not always up to the standard of American films. The audience, however, soon adjusts itself to the inferior photography and looks for the values behind it. The Grand International Theatre in Los Angeles is performing a service by placing imported films of this sort on exhibition.

**T**HE performances constitute the most notable element of *Masquerade In Vienna*. Each character portrayed has dimensions and what I can best describe as "solidity", that is to say, when one has seen the picture he feels he has intimately come to know actual persons. Script, acting, direction all work together to create this impression. It is because the actors say and do so many representative things that they impress themselves on the minds of the audience as living individuals. Here is to be found the secret of effective characterization — carefully selected representative acts.

Paula Wessely proves herself to be a fine artist, so effortlessly and effectively does she become wistful, comical, tender, or exultant. Taking the next honors is Anton Walbrook, as the morally lax artist, who encompasses many moods, always with entire conviction. Peter Peterson characterizes superbly, and Olga Tschechowa is as beautiful as she is accomplished.

Considerable ingenuity is shown in the use of the camera; there are several good montage effects and at least one skillful use of superimposition. But many of the scenes, particularly those in the early portion of the film, are glaring, and sometimes the movements of the players are jerky. Nor is the recording on a par with that of our own pictures, a part of which, incidently, features the voice of Caruso. One can only conclude that the Austrian technical equipment is inferior, and perhaps also the em-

ployment of it. At any rate, the spectator must adjust himself to looking beyond these shortcomings in order to perceive the dramatic artistry and the ideas which lie behind them. These elements he will find distinctive, of a sort rarely to be found in our own films. The film work coming out of Hollywood is, above everything else, a technical triumph.

## You Will Remember It

THE LAST NIGHT, from a scenario by E. G. Gabrilowitch and Yuri Reisman; musical score by A. Vepruk; directed by Mr. Reisman; produced by Mosfilm; at the Cameo. Cast: I. R. Peltser, M. G. Yarotskaya, N. I. Dorokhin, A. A. Konsovsky, V. A. Popov, N. N. Rybnikov, S. M. Vecheslov, T. K. Okunevskaya, V. V. Gribkov, I. I. Arkadin, M. I. Kholodov.

Reviewed by Edward Le Vecque

**S**OME pictures entertain us for the moment, only to be forgotten when we leave the theatre. Others are vividly impressed upon the memory and we delight in recalling them. To this class belongs this Russian effort.

The plot is simple. A one-night incident in the Bolshevik revolution. A girl of the upper classes is slightly attracted to a young student, the son of a worker. Her brother, a White Russian, fights the Bolsheviks who are lead by the brother of the young student. The whole incident develops in Moscow under the sputtering of machine guns and bursting of grenades.

But let us analyse the mechanics which give this simple story its tremendous dramatic power. Is the dialogue clever or brilliant? I do not know Russian, I merely

**ELEANOR GRIFFIN**

Writing for

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followed the superimposed English titles. Yet I feel I saw and heard everything. Thus the narration is visual, as it should be. At no time does a question arise to shatter the illusion of life which my imagination has conceived. No one indulges in theatrical heroics, although the opportunities are many. The people look and behave as my intelligence dictates they should.

We laugh, not at obviously planted comedians, but at situations that spring from the narrative, as when the servile old worker is lost in embarrassment when forced to guard his former employer, whom he still treats with deference sympathizing with his plight, but adding, with bitter reminiscence: "Oh! how you did exploit me these many years. . ."

**T**HE tempo is fast. Something is always happening or about to happen, thus riveting the attention. But it is the mood which elevates this production to memorable heights. Tempo, photography, sound, all become an integral part of the mood. The Russians understand mood. The Bolsheviks have barricaded themselves in the railroad station to wait for an incoming military train. Neither those in the station nor those in the train know whether they will meet friends or foe. Cautiously feeling its way inch by inch, the train slowly enters the immense station and stops. From every car window and door bristling bayonets stick out menacingly. Nothing stirs. Only the engine puffs ominously, like the deep rolling of marital drums before a cannonade. . . . The tension is oppressive. We do not hear the ordinary puffing of a railroad engine, but sound that suggests an impending battle, thus justifying my conviction in the power of Imaginative Sounds to create moods.

It is in editing where the Russians blunder. For no visible reason they suddenly chop in the middle of a sequence to pick it up later. Some day when they acquire the knack of cutting their pictures with that smoothness of continuity which distinguishes our Hollywood cutters, the Russians will have mastered all of the mechanics of good cinema known to this day.

The Eastman Kodak Company, which supplies most of the film for Hollywood's productions, earned nearly three million dollars more profit in 1936 than in 1935.

Why don't we see more of Clarence Muse on the screen? His recent work on the radio has been splendid.

DOGS

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## Cinematic Pulse

By Paul Jacobs

**W**HAT an audience wants, expects, and will respond to with the emotions and the pocket-book, determines the limitations of the film's medium; and thus what the audience wants determines the film's artistic and financial success. What an audience wants is simple. It is perfectly caught by B. M. Anderson in his brilliant discourse on *theme*:

"People are as basically alike in their emotions as the tones of the same octave in different stringed instruments. Strike any key on the piano. The same tone will vibrate in any other musical instrument in the room. This vibration is universal and common to all stringed instruments.

"Now think of human beings as so many emotional harps. Each is strung with the same basic emotions. All will vibrate, and vibrate alike to triumph, to hatred, to sorrow. Every normal individual has basically the same

# WILLIAM WYLER

Directed

"These Three"

"Dodsworth"

"Dead End"

for

SAMUEL GOLDWYN



# TALBOT JENNINGS

Now Writing  
for  
METRO-GOLDWYN-  
MAYER



harp-strings of emotion. The writer, recognizing this, will play upon the universal emotional harp. The reader will respond exactly as though a hand reached out of the page and plucked the same harp-string of his emotions."

And there we have it. The task of the screen writer then, is to determine those universal "harp-strings" and to differentiate between the truly fundamental and the artificial or cultivated response. For it is in this index to the irreducible source of audience-appeal that true film art is found.

**W**E know, for example, there is a vast difference between the literate and the illiterate public. Not a difference in basic emotions, but a difference in conditioned taste and intellect. It must be recognized that while the play, for example, is designed for a comparatively sophisticated audience, the film is designed to satisfy the thoughtful and the thoughtless, the child and the adult; the film must fit the complex appetite of the living world.

It is, of course, for this reason pantomime offers the ultimate in universality of appeal—story through movement. In bringing the talkie down to a verbal approximation of this ideal, it is evident that the beautiful and involved dialogue, so common to both A and B films, is the first serious dam against universal appeal. The really great dialoguer is the chap who catches the beauty and portent through complete simplicity of speech. Thus it seems necessary for us to look more closely at the psychology of articulation rather than at mere dialogue itself. Spoken thought embraces more than oral syntax.

Most of us are used to rambling, incoherent talk. We like it and we think in terms of it. And conversely, the necessity of following concise, logically coordinated speech is unpleasant since it requires close mental attention. And yet, the laws of good drama demand that the dialogue be vivid, terse, immediately assimilable and at the same time advance both plot, characterization, and mood or emotional effect without retarding the tempo or rhythm. Now, how can this evident contradiction be met? How to fulfill these exacting requirements and still present the illusion of normal, unhurried and plastic speech?

**F**IRST of all, we must remember that the total effect hinges upon the emotional *impression*. So we find that much of our reaction depends not upon the actual word-progression, but upon the tone, the inflection and the weight of intervening silences. Further, and even more important, is the effect of a well-balanced inter-play from character-revealing ejaculations which break up the rigidities of rhetoric and which carry the underlying portent. By these ejaculations I mean the rich masses of terse exclamations we have come to associate with pain, pleasure, regret, sympathy, etc.

Carried further, impression of meaning is solidified by intensifying the emotional intimacy between the audience and the filmic image. This is accomplished through synchronizing the movement, the gestures, and the speech with accentuating music. The orchestration, if properly handled, will induce or intensify a mood concomitant with the vocal expression. And if these total factors are

blended rhythmically, so that the alternating tempo produced is itself a final and intense expression of the scene—meaning, we have given our audience the ultimate in emotional clarity. And we find that while our actual verbiage is considerably less than usual, it is vitally relevant and produces the illusion of continuous and natural discourse.

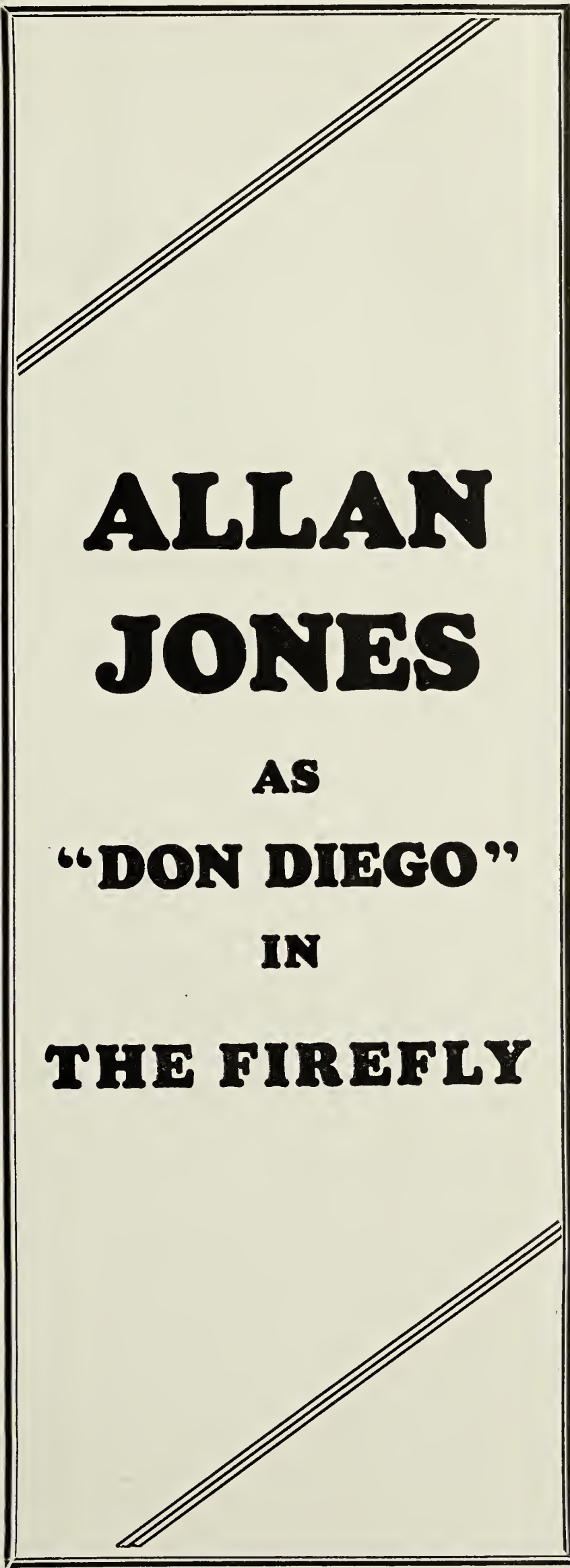
It becomes plain that the entire function of the film is to create emotional response—to “pluck the harp-strings of emotion.” We see that dialogue is merely one of the several implements to be used in creating the illusion necessary to make the emotions respond. In the above paragraph I mentioned the rhythmic blending of factors in dialogue. It would be well to break down the exterior mechanics of rhythm itself and see how the pieces fit.

**P**SYCHOLOGY defines rhythm as “an experienced recurrence of time patterns.” In other words, it is the feeling of timed undulance or swinging. It has been shown that the rhythm of a musical undercurrent if timed to the tempo of sequences of action, and to the tempotic rhythm of speech (which has itself previously been timed to the action, and thus to the mood) will produce an over-all rhythm of intense emotional strength. Of course this over-all rhythm is subject to the influence of other subordinate rhythms, the rhythms of character, for example. Each actor, by his own and his portrayed characteristics sets up a definite personality rhythm which is expressed through movement, speech, gesture and attitude idiosyncracies. Add to this the plot rhythm induced through the undulant series of crises, sub-climaxes, and the accelerations and pauses for dramatic and actional effect, and we have a truly involved filmic pattern to work with.

Now let us pick out the inferential facts that are relevant to the use of rhythm in making the dialogue and other filmic ingredients induce emotional reaction from an audience. We find that action, fused with dialogue, and contrasted with alternating silences, tends to break up the necessity for sustained attention. The audience receives units of impression, absorbs them and is ready for more only when these impressions are rhythmically fed into the visual and auditory apparatus of the spectator.

Here then, is the specific use of rhythm in every department of entertainment. When next you see a picture which pleases you, look for the interfusing of its emotion-producing elements into rhythmic chunks of impression. You will find that every element I have mentioned will have its own movement and will contribute it to an exclusive rhythm.

**P**ERHAPS if we have enough wars throughout the world the film industry will gather enough courage to make the great anti-war picture that will be the most powerful plea for universal peace ever presented. The motion picture is the most potent weapon modern civilization has at its disposal, yet those who control it are too spineless to permit it to serve civilization as it should.



**ALLAN  
JONES**

**AS**

**“DON DIEGO”**

**IN**

**THE FIREFLY**

# **Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin**

**Music and Lyrics**

**for**

**PARAMOUNT PICTURES**

# **NORMAN TAUROG**

**Directed**

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