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Film Reviews by G.M.

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

THE MORE THE MERRIER

(Columbia)



WELLINGTON audiences may be expected to appreciate this film more than those in other parts of New Zealand. For it is a comedy about the housing shortage in wartime Washington, and if the situation in Wellington is the worst in New Zealand, that in the U.S. capital at present is reputedly the worst in the world. It has, at any rate, become America's No. 1 current joke.

Nor is it only houses that are in short supply in Washington. There, if we may believe this film, the women now outnumber the men eight to one. So that, while on the one hand we see diplomats, financiers, and munitions-workers sleeping four in a bed, dossing down in hotel entrances, and sharing apartments in day and night shifts, on the other hand we have the spectacle of lone males being hunted down, surrounded, and practically devoured by packs of man-hungry girls. This is undoubtedly a fit subject for comedy

(though it could equally well be a subject for tragedy), and *The More the Merrier* sets out to extract every possible laugh from it. Unfortunately, the theme runs dry of humour some time before the end of the film, and thereafter, it is rather hard going for the stars—Jean Arthur, Joel McCrea, and Charles Coburn—as well as for the audience.

When the attractive, pure-minded Connie Milligan (Miss Arthur), is hectoring into sharing her small apartment with the jovial, but domineering old Mr. Dingle (Charles Coburn), she pretty soon finds herself saddled also with a clean-limbed, high-minded young Army sergeant named Joe Carter (Joel McCrea), whom Mr. Dingle squeezes into the already-overtaxed room space for no other reason than that he, Mr. Dingle, has a fancy to play Cupid. With the stage thus set, it immediately becomes obvious that the sole remaining purpose of the story is to get the two young people into the same bedroom together before the sergeant's leave expires. What takes up most of the time (and a good deal of one's patience), is the necessity for providing them with a marriage licence.

Well, it's amazing that three good players like these, and a director like George Stevens, can do with a plot like this. When wit fails, they fall back on knockabout farce, and often manage to make it very funny. They also manage to create characters for themselves. As I think someone else once said about someone else, Jean Arthur in particular is too shrewd an actress not to put the part before the horse-play. But something is wrong somewhere with *The More the Merrier*: the more I saw of it the less merry I found it getting. For one thing, I must confess I found some of the intimacies of Miss Arthur and Mr. McCrea mildly embarrassing as well as tedious. Indeed, the film comes almost as close as it possibly could to showing us the act of mating—the preliminaries are certainly there—and although I don't think anyone could call me puritanical, I do take the old-fashioned view that the screen is scarcely the place for that. Anyway, if there is this present great shortage of man-power, it does seem hardly fair to all the surplus women to remind them so pointedly of what they are missing.

ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT

(Warner Bros.)



AND a long-drawn-out night it was, too, with our little men thinking enviously of his chair by the fire and the bedtime stories he could have been telling his little ones.

Perhaps it was really the length of the film that was the trouble (it lasted one and three-quarter hours), because you can't get past the names in that cast: Humphrey Bogart, Peter Lorre, Conrad Veidt, and Kaaren Verne. There they all were: Bogart at his best, Lorre as soft and sibilant as ever and very insinuating, and Veidt more Nazi, more commanding than one ever expected him to become in the days of *The*

(continued on next page)

