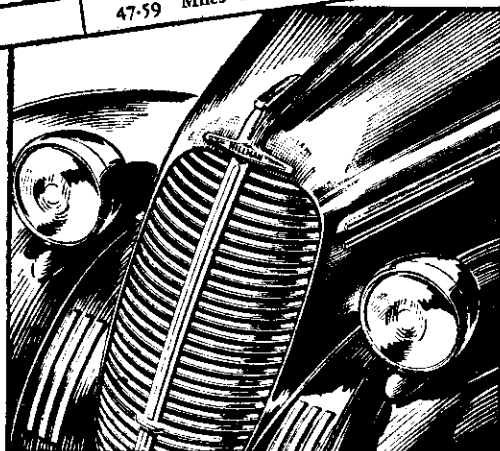


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Film Reviews by G.M.

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

MR. EMMANUEL

(Two Cities)

A MELLOW and moving character-study by Felix Aylmer, as a kindly old English Jew who goes to Berlin and puts his head right into the Nazi lion's mouth in order to be nice to a little boy, is the most notable feature of this British picture. I don't know the original story by Louis Golding, but I should be surprised to learn that it was exactly like this—that is, unless the author wrote it specially for the screen. The pattern is so exactly that of the cinema: the goodies are so good and the baddies are so bad; the climaxes are so neatly contrived; the whole plot is so melodramatic that it is difficult to feel very closely involved in it. Why, for example, did the British Government show so little interest in the fate of Mr. Emmanuel when he was arrested by the Nazis on a fake assassination charge? He was, after all, a British citizen with Anthony Eden's own signature on his passport, and the year was only 1938.

It is a pity to have to say this about *Mr. Emmanuel* because it has the very best intentions. But good intentions are not enough to make a good film, any more than labelling certain characters as "Goebbels" and "Himmler" is sufficient to make them resemble the originals.

THE CLOCK

(M-G-M)

SINCE seeing *Meet Me in St. Louis*, I have been looking out for another production directed by Vincente Minelli. And here it is: not

a musical film this time, even though Judy Garland is again one of the stars, but a very simple little romance which is so good in parts that it comes near (in those parts) to being great. In this story about a country-bred soldier on two days' final leave in New York and the girl he meets, there are scenes presented with so much insight and illumination, so much tenderness and commonplace beauty, that you might almost liken them to folk-poetry. But the dividing line between sensitivity of this rare kind and outright exhibitionism is very narrow; one step too far and art becomes artfulness. So it is perhaps not surprising that other passages in *The Clock* are sheer sentimental mush. Fortunately there are not enough of these low-grade moments to spoil the general high quality of the film.

THE stars are Judy Garland and Robert Walker and both act better than I have ever seen them act before. The reason for this, I suspect, is because they have never had better direction. *The Clock* is so much a director's picture that Vincente Minelli must take the blame for its faults as well as the credit for its virtues. A few of the faults, of course, may have been forced on him by the conventions of Hollywood, but unless he wanted it there was no need for him to introduce sugary music in that scene in the park, for instance, where the

soldier and the girl kiss for the first time. By subtle lighting, by keeping the sound-track almost silent and just allowing a few muted noises of the city at night to break through occasionally, by clever exaggeration and interleaving of long-shots and close-ups, Minelli achieves here a kind of cinematic surrealism; a mood of romantic mysticism in which the lovers are something more than individuals; are, in fact, somehow symbolic of young love itself, with its yearning and frustration. And then, just at this moment of rare exaltation, Minelli breaks the spell by giving the signal to the Heavenly Choir to tune up. Down we come to earth again with a bump.

Yet, in spite of such occasional lapses from good taste, Minelli has a very real sense of time and place. More than any other contemporary director he favours what is known as the "boom shot," and this technical device, whereby his camera continually swings and swoops on the arm of a crane above the set, gives his picture a fluidity and flexibility of composition that has rarely been excelled. Badly handled, the "boom shot" can be merely confusing and irritating, but Minelli is able to see a situation and see it whole; his extra players are not just lay-figures filling out a crowd scene; they have as much meaning and relevance, in miniature, as the principals. If you see *The Clock* I suggest you take time off from watching Judy Garland and Robert Walker in the railway station and subway scenes to study what is happening all around them: I think you will understand what I mean. Again, in the early morning scene in the milk-bar, Minelli does not hesitate to hand the whole film over temporarily to Keenan Wynn for a brilliant study in drunkenness.

All through this film you find this illuminating attention to detail. In fact, the director's insight into human behaviour is so keen that it keeps you continuously on your mental toes. Why, for example, does the heroine, when told to sit down and wait on a bench in the police station, ask hesitantly, "Can't I sit over there instead?" I wouldn't know the answer if my wife hadn't supplied it—because already seated on that bench was another girl wearing an identical frock!

As for that sense of time and place which I mentioned, notice Minelli's handling of the sequence in the museum where the boy and the girl, absorbed in one another, discuss trivialities while curled up on the stone feet of a Sphinx. And notice, too, how he gets a feeling of urgency, of time ticking away, into the story when the boy and girl, with only a few hours of his leave left, are separated in a subway rush and, finding one another at last, decide that they must get married. Minelli here mixes irony with pity as he shows them desperately overcoming the obstacles in their way; arguing with officialdom, getting a blood test, a special licence, permission to waive the 72-hour interval which should elapse before the ceremony. You

(continued on next page)