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Speaking Candidly, by G.M.

# PICKING THE TEN BEST FILMS

ARE films improving—or am I growing more tolerant as a critic? Having asked the question I shall leave it to others to answer when they learn that during the past year there were 16 occasions on which the Little Man stood up to applaud, as compared with 14 occasions in the previous year and 12 in 1943. Or does this simply mean that I have been choosing my own pictures more carefully, staying away whenever possible from those which gave an indication in advance of being poor-quality productions? I suspect that this may be the explanation, rather than that the general level of quality has notably risen.

There were, as the list on this page shows, 38 films during 1945 to which a sit-down clap was awarded, and this also represented an advance on 1944. Of the other films seen, 30 were sufficiently interesting and entertaining to keep the Little Man upright in his seat, while ten found him recumbent when the lights went up. This time there were no absolute "stinkers," justifying the Award of the Walk-Out; a fact which should, however, not necessarily be regarded as a sign of virtue in the films. It may merely be a sign of increasing virtue in the critic, who is prepared to die at his post rather than retreat.

THIS brings me to the Old Christmas Custom of Picking the Ten Best of the Year. To achieve the required result it is necessary to drop six titles from the list of A-grade awards. So I delete *Citizen Kane*, *King's Row*, *Madame Curie*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *Our Hearts Were Young and Gay*, and *Song of*

*Bernadette*, leaving the following as my final choice for the First Ten of 1945 (not in order of preference):

*Demi-Paradise*  
*The Fighting Lady*  
*Going My Way*  
*Henry V.*  
*The Suspect*  
*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*  
*This Happy Breed*  
*The Way Ahead*  
*Western Approaches*  
*Wilson*

I dropped *Citizen Kane*, not because it failed to measure up, but because, strictly speaking, it had no claim to be in the list in the first place, being a regrading of an old film, and not a new release. But apart from this, I prefer, instead of explaining why I deleted those six, to mention briefly my reasons for retaining the other ten. Well, then, I have included *Demi-Paradise* because, although it had faults, it was an ingenious, well-sustained, and good-humoured satire on Anglo-Russian relationships. *The Fighting Lady* is included as an outstanding American example of the straight documentary; and *Going My Way* because of the performances of Barry Fitzgerald and Bing Crosby and because, in spite of excessive sentimentality in parts, it was a very human piece of entertainment. *Henry V* not merely gets into the list but, I think, heads it, being a milestone of the cinema. *The Suspect* is there because it had fine acting by Laughton and was a first-class melodrama about a likable murderer; *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* is there because it was moving, honest, and imbued with social consciousness; *This Happy Breed* because it revealed Noel Coward at his best, giving us a warm-hearted study of an ordinary English family; *The Way Ahead* because it was such a fine and sensible tribute to the British soldier,

done in the semi-documentary manner; *Western Approaches* because it even improved on *San Demetrio*, *London*, as a factual story of the war at sea; and *Wilson* because of its courage in tackling a difficult biographical subject and, above all, because of the performance of Alexander Knox.

OF all the pictures I have seen during 1945, I nominate *Henry V* as the most outstanding—so outstanding that I have really no hesitation about making the choice. If *Western Approaches* had come before *San Demetrio* (last year's winner) it might have put in a serious challenge; and *This Happy Breed* could not be entirely disregarded. But *Henry V* breaks so much new ground, is so successful from almost every viewpoint, that it comes in an easy winner. I am, of course, in an unusually strong position in making this selection. I saw this British production at a preview, but it has not yet been publicly released. Until it is, members of the public can scarcely contradict me!

The figures after the titles in the following list indicate the date (day and month) of the issues of *The Listener* during 1945 in which films in the A and B categories were reviewed.

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Demi-Paradise (1.6)	Lassie Come Home (5.1)
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King's Row (27.7)	Murder, My Sweet (30.11)
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*Meet Me in St. Louis (7.9)	Objective, Burma (12.10)
Our Hearts Were Young and Gay (30.11)	On Approval (9.11)
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*Western Approaches (21.9)	A Song to Remember (24.8)
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I'll Be Seeing You (19.10)	Andy Hardy's Blonde Trouble (Bathing Beauty)
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Keys of the Kingdom (28.9)	Christmas Holiday
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	Dark Waters

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