

"Oh my goodness, no! Just a water main."

(continued from previous page)

Though it is a trifle disconcerting to find the cynical, philandering Rex Harrison of *Blithe Spirit* and *The Rake's Progress* appearing now as a serious-minded Siamese (his first Hollywood role) he gives an earnest and consistent impersonation. If he fails to be wholly convincing it is not for want of trying, but because of the fact that it is virtually impossible for Occidentals to portray Orientals successfully. This is, indeed, the one insuperable handicap of the whole film, and of all films like it. Under his make-up and exotic costumes, and headgear, King Mongkut is unmistakably Anglo-Saxon; his Prime Minister (Lee Cobb) is an admirable fellow, but he looks like a Varsity full-back or a surf champion; and Linda Darnell, as the Royal favourite who gets herself burnt at the stake for a romantic indiscretion, resembles a Siamese girl only a fraction more than she resembles Sarah Bernhardt. Yet even supposing the producer had managed to assemble a whole cast able to act and look like true Siamese, there would still be the problem of the dialogue. The familiar device of getting all the players to chatter in broken English, with what may be a few authentic Siamese phrases thrown in, isn't very convincing, but I don't know what else they could do.

In view of what I have said in the preceding paragraph, the Little Man's stand-up clap may seem open to question. But these gradings are always relative. Instead of being blamed for defects which, for the most part, were inescapable, being inherent in the subject-matter, I think the producers of *Anna and the King of Siam* should rather be given full credit for tackling such a difficult yet fascinating subject and for making such a very good job of it.

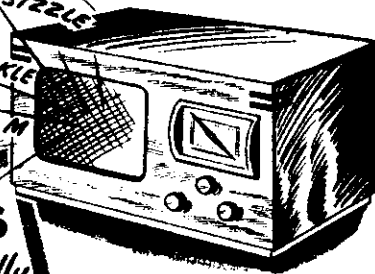
EASY TO WED (M-G-M)



YOU may recall an excellent comedy called *Libelled Lady* which was made in 1936, which starred Jean Harlow, Myrna Loy, William Powell, and Spencer Tracy, and in which Powell made his heroic attempt to pronounce "Lake Taupo." Well, this is what is left of that comedy, after they have got through trying to revive it with injections of technicolour and hot music, not to mention the much-heralded charms of Mr. Van Johnson and Miss Esther Williams. In point of fact, the only persons who have any success in bringing the plot to life are Keenan Wynn and Lucille Ball, and even for them it is a struggle.

Of course, if you share the adoration of the bobby-sox brigade in the U.S.A. for Van Johnson, *Easy to Wed* has certain obvious advantages, since his innocent, cherubic countenance is on the screen, much of the time in yearning close-up, for a good part of the film's two hours. Yet even his most enraptured admirers may question the wisdom of casting this baby-faced young man, whose mannerisms suggest that he is not long out of the cradle, in the role of a sophisticated professional heartbreaker whose assignment on this occasion is to compromise Esther Williams in order to make her millionaire father (Cecil Kellaway) drop a libel suit against a newspaper. To offset their apparent lack of discernment in this direction, the producers allow Miss Williams to be glimpsed once or twice in a bathing suit, and even to kiss Mr. Johnson under water. But this, plus one excellent musical sequence and the few laughs contributed by Miss Ball and Mr. Wynn yield, I feel, a rather inadequate return in entertainment.

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