

# SPEAKING CANDIDLY

## NOTORIOUS

(RKO Radio)



AFTER a leisurely opening which seems designed principally to exploit the photogenic qualities of Miss Ingrid Bergman and the ability of Mr. Cary Grant to carry on a conversation while kissing her passionately, *Notorious* comes to light with some of the thrills to be expected from a story about spies written by Ben Hecht and directed by Alfred Hitchcock. They are not taken from the top-drawer of the Hitchcock cabinet; but even a second-grade Hitchcock thriller is still better than the best which most other film-makers can manage in this field.

Following in the tracks of *Gilda* and one or two other recent movies, *Notorious* takes us to South America, where, apparently, the wicked Nazis have not ceased from troubling and the U.S. Security Service is consequently not at rest. Cary Grant is an accredited (though judging by appearances somewhat inept and inexperienced) secret agent, and Miss Bergman is co-opted because her father was a traitorous German though she herself is known to be loyal to Uncle Sam. Because of her father she has the entrée to some inner Brazilian circles where certain flint-faced Latins with Teutonic leanings are doing something highly sinister with uranium deposits which, for reasons best known to themselves, they keep sealed up in champagne bottles in the cellar of their leader, Claude Rains. It has, of course, not taken Miss Bergman and Mr. Grant, working together, any time at all to fall very much in love; and as soon as they reach Brazil we are treated to the *Notorious* (and, I thought, rather offensively intimate) kissing sequence in which the stars nuzzle each other for a prolonged session in close-up while Mr. Grant seems to be doing his best to talk with his tongue in her cheek. Fortunately, perhaps, patriotism intervenes; Miss Bergman is officially assigned to marry Nazi Claude Rains in order to find out all about those bottles of uranium; Mr. Grant assumes an aloof and wounded air; and both he and she behave in what seems an unnecessarily bitter manner toward one another whenever they meet — unnecessarily, since both must have known from the outset that Duty would come before Love.

However, when Miss Bergman becomes the Nazi's bride, she and Mr. Grant do succeed—in spite of a very clumsy technique of spying which would get them nowhere in real life—in penetrating the Secret of the Cellar. Then the Nazi penetrates her secret, and with the aid of his mother starts putting doses of slow poison in his bride's coffee. Just in time for her health and the audience's peace of mind, Mr. Grant comes to the rescue. In a typical movie situation (which Hitchcock should know better than to include), hero and half-dead heroine spend an infuriatingly long time in her bedroom in explanations, reconciliations, and renewed love-making, instead of getting on with the urgent job of sneaking away to safety. But by good luck rather than good judgment they do slip from the clutches of the villain, their job accomplished,

and at the same time manage to leave him to a nasty fate. Thus the end of *Notorious* is both happy and glorious.

The film has a few badly-bungled or merely pedestrian passages, and certainly not the over-all excellence that one might expect from such a combination of top-notch stars, script-writer, and director. But it has one feature very much in its favour, something which distinguishes it as an authentic Hitchcock thriller. Unlike most contemporary films of its type, *Notorious* invariably secures its thrills by an appeal to the audience's imagination, by allowing its horror to be felt but not seen. Some particularly nasty and violent things happen to several of the characters in the course of the story, but they happen off-screen, and the film is much the better for this intelligent reticence. It is only a pity that Hitchcock did not extend it to the love-making.

## QUIET WEEK-END

(Associated British Pictures)

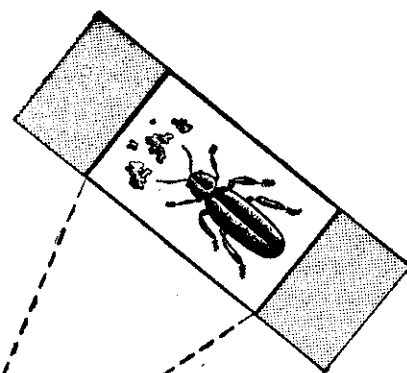


SOME people I know have been talking in a rather extravagant way about this film, declaring that it is one of the funniest and finest British comedies ever made, and easily the equal of *Quiet Wedding* and *Blithe Spirit*. The reason, I think, is that we are now seeing so many good British films, after a long period during which we saw mostly bad ones, that there is a tendency to regard even an inferior British production as better than it is, just because it wasn't made in Hollywood. *Quiet Week-End* is not, in fact, an inferior film (though, despite imitation, it certainly isn't another *Quiet Wedding*, and even less a *Blithe Spirit*). My own opinion, for what it is worth, is that it is a quite enjoyable but very typical photographed English stage-play, presenting popular stock characters in popular stock situations, without much imagination but with plenty of good intentions and considerable humour. Amid a bunch of rather stereotyped performances, there are perhaps three moderately good ones, and a fourth which is really brilliant—by Marjorie Fielding, who plays the part of the mother, and who very nearly meets the famous prescription for a great actress that she should "by the mere movement of the muscles in her back be able to indicate that she has a maiden aunt living in Brixton."

Don't let me put you off *Quiet Week-End*. I think you will find, as I did, that it provides a pleasant evening's entertainment—especially perhaps if you are an angler. But don't let us lose our sense of proportion either. There is some danger that, in the present springtide of enthusiasm for the British film, an uncritical mental climate is being created in which nationality counts for more than genuine merit.

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