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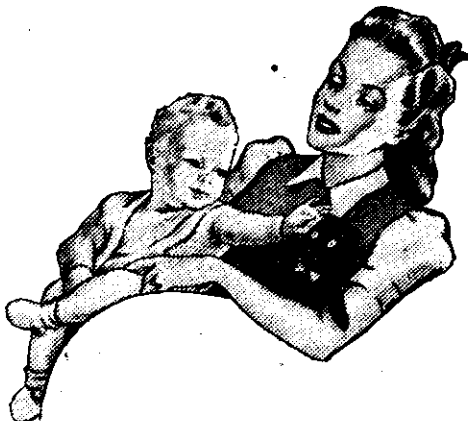
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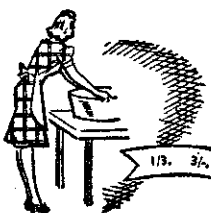
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## Film Reviews by G.M.

# SPEAKING CANDIDLY

## THE CHARM OF LA BOHEME

(Inter-Gloria Film, Vienna)

 THIS Austrian film, produced just before the war and now given a local clearance, comes as close to presenting grand opera on the screen as any film I can remember. It doesn't go quite the whole distance, for it will be noted that the story is a variation on, or rather a parallel of, the Puccini plot, and not the opera-plot itself. This parallelism is ingeniously enough contrived, though you will probably be conscious some of the time that it is contrived. The hero is a Parisian operatic student with ambition, and the heroine is a talented young singer with consumption. They meet in a Bohemian atmosphere, fall in love, have minor disagreements, but on the whole are idyllically happy—or would be if only he could get his big chance in opera. So the heroine, who has a rich admirer without honourable intentions but plenty of influence, makes the necessary sacrifice of her scruples (though not, at this time, of anything else), and an audition is arranged.

But now it is time for the tragic atmosphere to deepen. On the very night that the hero has a *succès fou* in the role of Rudolpho in *La Bohème*, the heroine is stricken low with her disease. Rather than prejudice her lover's chances at the beginning of his career, she makes the customary melodramatic pretence that she was never in earnest about marriage: he goes off in one direction on the usual triumphant tour of world capitals; she goes off in another with her rich admirer. Months later they meet again, still full of misunderstanding and injured pride. The hero is due to sing Rudolpho in a Parisian presentation of *La Bohème*; the heroine, stage-managing the situation desperately, arranges to sing Mimi. So the pair are finally reunited and reconciled in a literal representation of the opera's tragic last scene, the heroine coughing out her life on the stage in the arms of her lover.

\* \* \*

[T has often occurred to me to wonder whether the role of Mimi is physically possible: that is to say, whether a woman in the last extremity of phthisis pulmonum could produce the musical sounds demanded by Puccini's score. I doubt very much if it is possible; and certainly there can be few operatic sights more ludicrous than that of a hale and hearty 16-stone prima donna expiring Puccinically. Yet Martha Eggerth, who plays Mimi in this film, comes as near as anybody could, I am sure, to making the situation both convincing and moving: she has a clear and charming voice, as well as the type of beauty which the role demands but does not always get in opera.


About Jan Kiepura, who plays the hero, I cannot be so enthusiastic. He

belongs to the school of operatic acting which relies principally on a generous display of dentures, tonsils, and the whites of the eyes, and on plenty of semaphoring with the arms, while the artist remains emotionally as wooden as a totem-pole. "You should thank God that He has given you such a marvelous voice," says somebody to Mr. Kiepura in the course of the film. This strikes me as very sound advice, since he hasn't much else to be thankful for. However, I do willingly concede that Mr. Kiepura is no mean voice-producer, and his popularity as a singer will probably, in the opinion of most people, outweigh his obvious shortcomings as an actor.

The dialogue is in German, the subtitles (adequate) are in English; there are some satisfactory comic interludes; and in the course of the story you do manage to get a pretty big slice of the *La Bohème* score, either sung by the stars and chorus, or played by the Vienna State Philharmonic Orchestra. So far as music goes, at least, I think you have something here.

## THE TROUBLE WITH WOMEN

(Paramount)

 [T would, I suppose, be a glimpse of the obvious to suggest that the trouble with women is men. But this Paramount comedy is nothing if not obvious: when they compounded it they seem to have omitted subtlety entirely from among the ingredients. They also used a very familiar Hollywood recipe—the girl-shy professor with unorthodox theories who is pursued and pilloried by the girl-reporter but ends by marrying her. Gary Cooper and Barbara Stanwyck did much the same sort of thing, and did it considerably better, in *Ball of Fire* some years back; but the audience seems to find the efforts of Ray Milland and Teresa Wright in the present case amusing enough. They even seem prepared to accept Ray Milland as a Professor of Psychology with as little questioning as the governors of Mid-West University do. Pretty soon, of course, the governors and the other members of the faculty begin to have some doubts, when he is discovered with a pretty girl under the bed in his bachelor apartments, and when one of the local papers launches a campaign to ridicule him and his alleged theory that all women enjoy rough tactics from the dominant male sex. To secure evidence, the heroine enrolls herself as one of his psychology students; the results are clinically interesting, for the Professor himself reacts immediately to propinquity with this desirable young woman and proceeds with scientific detachment to chart his own case-history. Then, just when the girl-reporter and her tough news-editor, (Brian Donlevy) have the poor sap exactly where they want him, she discovers, of course, that she doesn't want him there at all.

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