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## Film Reviews, by Jno.

# TWO TO REMEMBER

## THE WINDOW

(RKO-Radio)

**I** SAW two films last week, either of which would have been enough to leave me in a reasonably contented frame of mind. One, *Johnny Belinda*, arrived to the accompaniment of the trumpet-blasts inevitably associated with films which have been marked out for approval by the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. The other, *The Window*, slipped into Wellington and out again almost unnoticed. If I seem to favour the latter, therefore, it is because I think its virtues deserve emphasis, and not just because of ingrained cussedness and perversity. Both are good films.

I felt favourably disposed towards *The Window* as soon as I saw there were no stars in the cast—unless one includes the juvenile Bobby Driscoll in that category. When directors or producers disappoint us, the fault (I have often felt) is not in themselves so much as in their stars—or at least in the star system. Give a good producer the freedom to control a group of half-anonymous but competent players, give him a good script, and a good film should follow as inevitably as a Euclidian corollary.

And *The Window* has a good script, and a good producer in Dore Schary—and the finished production is the neatest piece of small-scale drama which I have seen since *Pitfall* (*Listener*, 4.2.49). The purist might complain that occasionally it is a little too neat, that the texture is in places too closely woven and the tension maintained more than once by ignoring the laws of probability. But the tension is maintained most effectively, and that is the acid test of the film's quality.

In every department the work done is above average. I can't remember off-hand when last I was so pleased with the acting of an American juvenile as I was with Bobby Driscoll's portrayal of the imaginative small boy whose penchant for telling tall stories nearly costs him his life. Barbara Hale and Arthur Kennedy—both unknown to me—were unusually well cast as the boy's working-class parents. The strong atmosphere of naturalism, in fact, was perhaps the most notable general characteristic of the film. The settings were authentic (New York *in situ*), and the players looked, spoke, and moved like real people. Even the villains of the piece emerged as believable human beings whose behaviour one could understand, and with whose frantic terror one could even sympathise. *The Window* is not a long film (in Hollywood, where they measure length rather than depth, they would call it a B Grade production), but it is just long enough. Nine out of ten films could with advantage be cut down to 7,000 feet and few cash customers (least of all those who now pack the last trams home) would complain about it.

## JOHNNY BELINDA

(Warner Bros.)

AS a general rule I find it difficult to take Hollywood's Academy Awards seriously. Some, notably that made to

## BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "*The Window*."  
FAIR TO FINE: "*Johnny Belinda*."

Ronald Colman for his acting in *A Double Life*, have left me mystified, and others have seemed more like long-service or good-conduct prizes than awards for merit. But I have no quarrel with the Oscar awarded to Jane Wyman. If *The Window* was a producer's picture, *Johnny Belinda* belongs to the cast and there is no gainsaying the sensitivity and finish of the star's performance.

To portray a deaf mute would be exacting enough in a minor role, but to make such an unfortunate the central character in a story, to demand of the actress not only the portrayal of all shades of emotion by means of facial expression and gesture, but the slow emergence of a human personality from complete intellectual isolation was a test of virtuosity from which few could have emerged with credit. Miss Wyman, however, not only brought the part to life, but invested it with warmth and tenderness and beauty. It was a skilful and restrained piece of acting—a sterling piece of work in fact, if one can say that of a hard-currency production.

In the supporting roles Lew Ayres, Charles Bickford and Agnes Moorehead all turned in satisfying performances, though I had occasional doubts about Lew Ayres. He is a smooth performer (and a nice young man, too), but he has played the young doctor so long that I can almost detect a trace of bedside manner in his style—a sort of occupational gentleness perhaps. For him Agnes Moorehead and Charles Bickford, as tough Cape Breton Islanders, proved admirable foils. I liked Miss Moorehead's portrayal of Belinda's aunt. She has good hands—exasperation almost crackles from her fingertips—and a fine face.

But beyond the circle of the four central figures *Johnny Belinda* is rather conventional in its characterisations and in its direction. There are some attractive location-shots—rockbound coasts and fishing-boats—but some of the interiors smack of the studio lot, there are traces of an antique pre-Freudian symbolism, and the dialogue is occasionally rather less moving than Jane Wyman's eloquent silences.



JANE WYMAN  
Virtuosity was rewarded

N.Z. LISTENER, OCTOBER 7, 1949.