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SELZNICK INTERNATIONAL presents

# REBECCA

starring  
**LAURENCE OLIVIER**  
**JOAN FONTAINE**

Directed by **ALFRED HITCHCOCK**  
Produced by **DAVID O. SELZNICK**

who made "GONE WITH THE WIND"  
Released thru UNITED ARTISTS

Recommended by the Censor for Adults

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## SPEAKING CANDIDLY

### Film Reviews

By G.M.



### REBECCA

(United Artists)

Here is the kind of picture which stabilises one's often wavering faith in Hollywood. It would be gratifying to assign all the praise to the British director Alfred Hitchcock, but that would be unfair to the American producer, David Selznick, whose choice of Joan Fontaine as the heroine is responsible in large measure for the film's success. It would also be unfair to a lot of other people.

Just how Selznick came to pick Joan Fontaine, an almost unknown and untried actress, for one of the most exacting roles of recent screen history is something probably only Selznick could explain. Those who saw her lumbering gamely through a part that should have been Ginger Rogers's in "A Damsel in Distress" could never have imagined that Miss Fontaine had the least qualification for the role of the second Mrs. de Winter in Daphne du Maurier's best-seller, "Rebecca." A small part in "The Women" suggested that Joan Fontaine might have more in her than met the eye; but to most film fans, up till now, she has been merely Olivia de Havilland's young sister. Now, if she recovers from a grave operation which she recently underwent, she may well become one of the screen's leading exponents of drama.

As the unnamed heroine of "Rebecca," the young, inexperienced, almost gawky girl who comes to the magnificent, rambling old Cornish mansion of Manderley as the second wife of Manderley's Byronic, haunted lord and master, Maxim de Winter, Joan Fontaine reveals a perception of character, plus an ability to interpret it, which would merit being termed sensational if Hollywood hadn't stripped the term of meaning by abusing it. Let's call it "surprising" and leave it at that.

Laurence Olivier is almost as well chosen for the role of the moody Maxim de Winter, who brings home a timid, eager bride from the Riviera and casts her into an atmosphere of strange terror. Over them both broods the impalpable menace of the dead Rebecca, the first Mrs. de Winter, dominating the household in a spiritual sense just as the impassive housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers (Judith Anderson) dominates it in a physical sense.

It is Alfred Hitchcock's contribution to the film that he has taken a wordy novel and translated it to the cinema without destroying the atmosphere or even losing much of the detail, and yet without cluttering up the action by dialogue. Hitchcock is a master of mysterious suggestion; here he has used most of his usual tricks and several new ones to convey an uncanny sense of expectancy in almost every scene. So,

although the film runs for more than two hours, it seems to be over in half that time. Like a good book, it grips from first fade-in to last fade-out.

Note for cynics: The appearance on this page of an advertisement for "Rebecca" bears no relation to the enthusiastic contents of this review.

### BALALAIKA

(M-G-M)

This version of the celebrated stage show is all that is meant by an M-G-M. Magnificent super-musical. Personally I've never been able to understand why the stage show of "Balalaika" was so celebrated; and in spite of Ilona Massey, Nelson Eddy, about half the other stars of M-G-M's pay-sheet and most of the scenery in their vaults, plus some very good songs (mainly borrowed from the classics) and one or two indifferent ones—in spite of all this, I'm still faintly querulous.

The story, full of nostalgic yearning for the dear dead days beyond recall in Tsarist Russia, is one of those popular romantic confections which suggest that playwrights have at least benefited by the Red Revolution if nobody else has. The "goodies" (with few exceptions) are all grand dukes, ladies-in-waiting, princes, or loyal musicians; the "baddies" (with even fewer exceptions) are all Bolshies of the deepest and most sinister hue. The princely hero loves the chief Bolshie's daughter. Plots. Bombs. War. Revolution. Chaos. Heartbreak. Emigrés in Paris keeping up the old tradition. Reunion of Prince (now a doorkeeper) with Bolshie's daughter. All is forgiven. Joyous music. Curtain.

People who like this kind of thing—and there are plenty of 'em—will like "Balalaika" very much. Even the sight of Nelson Eddy as a Cossack prince won't worry them. But as you probably gather, it did worry me.

### IT'S A DATE

(Universal)

Deanna Durbin continues with her very pleasant process of growing up—pleasant, that is, for the audience, but not quite so pleasant for Miss Durbin's screen self, who this time adds to the pangs of unrequited juvenile love a conflict of the soul between loyalty and ambition. But Miss Durbin's essay into the more adult emotions is handled with the same felicity as any of her earlier efforts.

Deanna is now past the puppy stage. In "It's a Date" she is no longer a moon-struck schoolgirl but a self-possessed young person, rising 18, who is self-possessed enough to give her widowed mother (Kay Francis) some qualms when she determinedly sets her cap at an attractive bachelor (Walter Pidgeon) who is at least twice her age. For the benefit of Deanna's admirers who may deplore such romantic pre-

cociousness, it should be explained that it is largely cub-reaction; for Deanna, having taken the path of self-sacrifice when she and her mother both covet the same leading role in a play, decides that the path might as well end at the altar as soon as possible. Farewell the foot-lights! Welcome domesticity! Unfortunately, mother gets in the way again. Deanna's choice for husband takes one look at mother and thereafter cannot regard Deanna as anything but a prospective step-daughter. It is a bitter cup for Miss Eighteen, yet there are compensations. Mother takes the man, but daughter takes the stage, in the coveted role which she had so nobly renounced.

"It's a Date" is a very acceptable mixture of song, sentiment and comedy. So long as they can keep Deanna's pictures growing up with her like this, she should remain Universal's greatest single asset. The only false note in this film is its title. Presumably they called it "It's a Date" in order to inspire the advertising boys to write copy about making a date for Deanna's latest and greatest, etc., etc. I can think of no other valid reason.

### THE EARL OF CHICAGO

(M-G-M)

Ever since he raised the critics' eyebrows and won their applause by portraying Danny the murderous bell-boy in "Night Must Fall," and at the same time dismayed those feminine admirers who had complacently typed him as a gentle boudoir Romeo, Robert Montgomery has been wanting to repeat the performance. Now, in "The Earl of Chicago," M-G-M again give him the chance to be bad. And he is pretty good. But, like most encores, the film falls short of his first triumphant venture into the underworld.

This time the sleek Mr. Montgomery portrays a complicated gangster, a Chicago thug who double-crosses and murders his way (by proxy) into a dominating position among the post-Prohibition rackets, but who is himself allergic to firearms. He shakes like a jelly at the very sight of a gun. This choice young specimen falls heir (quite legitimately) to an ancient and honourable English earldom and crosses the Atlantic with the frankly dishonest intention of getting what he can out of it. But in England, blood miraculously begins to tell. The influence of ancestral halls, family portraits, ritual in the House of Lords, and obsequious oldest inhabitants on his lordly estate, gradually but irresistibly work a change in the soul of this scion of the Chicago sewers (once removed).

Hollywood, however, spares us the complete redemption; or rather it brings it about in rather surprising fashion. The noble gangster doesn't turn over a completely clean leaf, marry into the gentry (surprisingly enough, there isn't a heroine in the story) and become a Master of Hounds. Instead, he loses his fear of guns just long enough to shoot an equally crooked accomplice, faces trial by his peers, and then, tradition coming uppermost at last, puts on his regalia and marches to his execution in the Tower, with firm tread and chin up—dying with the dignity of a nobleman, while the faithful family butler (Edmund Gwenn) looks on with tearful approval at this sign of grace.

Montgomery does it remarkably well; so do all the assistant peers, gangsters, rustics, and retainers; but the story rather sticks in one's throat.