

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

IRENE
(RKO)

Hollywood, questing desperately after something new, is always turning up with a surprise. Mickey Rooney, we find (not that it comes under the heading of laudable achievements), can both sing and play a complicated set of drums. Garbo turns comedienne, John Barrymore satirises himself. "Irene" is also a surprise. Anna Neagle, whom we'd come to link with Queen Victoria just as inevitably as we link George Arliss with Disraeli, demonstrates that she can dance, sing, flirt, and wear décolleté gowns with the youngest and most seductive of Hollywood's chorines.

The truth is Anna Neagle did start off as a chorus girl and worked up to Queen Victoria after years of patient coaching by Herbert Wilcox. In eight years Wilcox and Anna Neagle have made 14 pictures together, among them "Victoria the Great," "Sixty Glorious Years" (second Victorian impersonation), and "Nurse Edith Cavell." On the way, when Wilcox decided to rejuvenate Miss Neagle, was "Queen of Destiny" (third Victorian impersonation).

"Irene" is James Montgomery's stage show, jazzed up a little and with the whiskers brushed off. It is the story of how a little sales girl dances her way into the heart of a young millionaire (Ray Milland), who, just to make a job for his discovery, buys a controlling interest in an exclusive dress salon. There's really little else to the tale — just a series of simple misunderstandings and mishaps that never look like ending anywhere else but in an embrace.

But for all its naivete, "Irene" has a lilting, lyric quality, and is as happy and carefree as Irene herself. After so much Victorianism it's pleasant to be reminded that Anna Neagle has nice legs, a pretty figure, and, as a sudden blob of technicolor reveals, startlingly red hair. The technicolor, by the way, is interesting. We are sailing along pleasantly in black and white when, presto, we're knocked in the eye with a thousand feet of technicolor. And when Miss Neagle's red hair and Alice Blue Gown have been dis-

played sufficiently, we melt back into black and white. It might have been an unpleasant disruption, but Mr. Wilcox has managed it expertly.

To me the only discordant note was a red hot version of the "Alice Blue Gown" song, violently swung by a Harlem revue, complete with a chocolate-coloured mammy weighing two or three hundredweight and shaking like a blancmange.

In case you're interested—and there's no reason why you shouldn't be—the cast includes, besides Ray Milland, Billie Burke, May Robson, Alan Marshall, and Roland Young.

THE DOCTOR TAKES A WIFE

(Columbia)

Other directors may make more lavish and more spectacular comedies, but when it comes to turning out an honest job of work it seems there are few to touch Columbia's Alexander Hall. Almost any season Mr. Hall can be relied upon to produce from his directorial hat at least a couple of bright farces. Last season "Good Girls Go To Paris" and "The Amazing Mr. Williams"; this season "The Doctor Takes a Wife" and "He Stayed for Breakfast."

The first two both starred Joan Blondell and Melvyn Douglas. "The Doctor Takes a Wife" has Loretta Young and Ray Milland, and "He Stayed for Breakfast" has Loretta Young and Melvyn Douglas. Mr. Hall, it will be seen, does not use many bells, but nobody can deny that he rings a surprising number of changes.

"The Doctor Takes a Wife" is what may be described as a typical Hollywood fabrication. One can almost picture the story conference. . . "We'll have them married," says one writer. "And yet not married. That will keep the romance hot," says another. "Give them careers; that'll help with the situations," adds a third. "And don't forget the Mistake That Changes Their Lives," says a fourth. And everyone is set to go.

What actually happens is that Loretta Young is a novelist who has a best-

seller up her sleeve in the form of a book glorifying the spinster. By an accident she is married off to a young bachelor doctor, Ray Milland. She can't deny the marriage and risk a scandal, so they set up house together and she writes another book glorifying the married woman. Add complications by the dozen for Mr. Milland, a couple of bedroom scenes, and an ending which you can be left to guess at, and there you have "The Doctor Takes a Wife."

Altogether a bright little comedy that deserves well.

SAFARI

(Paramount)

Tullio Carminati goes lion-hunting in Africa; Madeleine Carroll (who is getting plump), goes man-hunting with him; and Douglas Fairbanks Junior goes along, too, as the big-game hunter in charge of the expedition. He is one of the strong, silent type, who thinks women are just a nuisance, especially on safari, but after several days of romance and jealousy under a tropic sun, opinions are being revised all round. Finally, Carminati gets his lion and a disappointment, Madeleine gets her man (not the one she originally intended), the lion almost gets Fairbanks, and Fairbanks gets Madeleine.

This film is competently produced and persuasively acted, but the plot is threadbare; exotic settings cannot disguise the fact that the eternal triangle is exactly the same in Africa as anywhere else. Nor does it really help to cover up the poverty of plot for the hero to introduce a quite irrelevant dissertation on the subject of defending liberty from aggression. The fact that almost every second screen character these days is called on to make a similar topical oration, smacks rather too much of opportunism, of dragging in topicality by the scruff of the neck.

The big surprise in "Safari"—and a pleasant one—is the metamorphosis of Lynne Overman into a cheerful Scotsman with a walrus moustache and an accent as thick as porridge.

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TWENTY YEARS BEHIND A MOVIE CAMERA

(Continued from previous page)

Bernard Shaw was the most helpful subject I have ever had to photograph. He knew exactly what I should do, which lens I should use, and how he should pose. In fact, if he could have managed it, he would have taken the picture as well. But he was amusing and charming with it all, and gave me such a provocative interview that the film was snapped up in America and shown all over the world. My first full-length talkie feature was "On the Friendly Road," in which a featured part was played by "Uncle Scrim," and this was followed, recently, by a talking version of "Rewi's Last Stand."

An Ambitious Film

"Rewi's Last Stand" is easily the most ambitious thing I have attempted. It runs two hours, and cost a considerable amount to produce, both in money and honest New Zealand toil. The central

incident of the picture is the siege of Orakau, and to film it the company I assembled went on location at a remarkably preserved pa 14 miles south of Te Awamutu, in the King Country. There, with the aid of old War Office survey plans, we built an exact replica of Orakau Pa, complete with trenches, dug-outs and parapets. Clothing factories worked overtime completing uniforms made to the pattern worn by the militiamen of 1863, and the whole undertaking grew bigger and bigger until I almost felt justified in announcing a Cast of Thousands.

One point of interest about "Rewi's Last Stand" is that the star is a young Maori girl, Ramai Te Miha. Since making the film she has appeared in radio in Australia, and she was recently offered a contract at the New York World's Fair.

Future plans? Well, they depend on a list of things, but I keep in mind what Bernard Shaw said when he was here: "Unless New Zealand learns to make her own talkies she will lose her soul."

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