

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

NORTHWEST PASSAGE

(M-G-M)

IT took M-G-M two big pictures to deal justly by Thomas Edison. It is going to take them at least the same number to discover the Northwest Passage. Their film version of Kenneth Roberts's best-seller covers only the first, more bloodthirsty part of the narrative, and everybody in the story is so busy slaughtering Indians and getting away with a whole topknot that there is hardly time even to talk about the northwest passage, much less look for it. That will come however: M-G-M have promised us a sequel with the same cast.

If the second film is as well done as the first it should be worth looking out for. Though "Northwest Passage" (or,

quitces, pulling their whale-boats up mountain sides, wading waist deep through swamps for days, sleeping in the forks of trees like bedraggled wildfowl, and forming a human chain to cross the torrential St. Francis River, the Rangers arrive at their destination. Here the Abenaki Indians are all obligingly suffering from a hangover, so the work of massacre is well under way before the victims are properly awake.

Though the Rangers on the screen are slightly more humane than their originals in the book and spare an occasional woman and child, the massacre sequence is gory and thorough-going enough to satisfy the blood-lust of any audience—and may disgust a few of the more sensitive spirits. Liquidating the Abenakis doesn't seem to settle the



GIRLS TOGETHER: Maureen O'Hara and Lucille Ball are seen in this group from the RKO film "Dance, Girl, Dance"

as it is more correctly sub-titled, "Rogers's Rangers") is preoccupied with the subject of massacring Redskins—to the exclusion of all but the flimsiest "love-interest"—it is very much more than routine Cowboys-and-Indians melodrama. In point of fact, cowboys weren't thought of at the period of this story—round about 1759, when the British and French were engaged in an unpleasant but adventurous type of warfare for control of North America, with aid from any Indians who could be persuaded to come in on one side or the other. Instead of cowboys there are the Rangers of Major Robert Rogers, a very tough and interesting customer very toughly and interestingly portrayed by Spencer Tracy. These hardy fighters wear natty green buckskin uniforms which, unless I'm mistaken, served as a pattern for those worn later by the King's Royal Rifle Corps; and in their enthusiasm for scalp-hunting they undergo the most remarkable hardships. In order to wipe off some old scores they embark on an expedition to wipe out an entire settlement of Abenaki Indians at St. Francis. After dodging Frenchmen but not mos-

Indian problem, however, and the hardships encountered by the Rangers on the way up are nothing to those encountered on the way back. After other Indians and Frenchmen have harassed them, and famine has wasted them, about a-third of the force is at last led by the indomitable Major to a fort where they can receive a square meal and the thanks of the grateful British. We last see what is left of the gallant band marching off refreshed to look for that northwest passage in Part Two.

Most impressive feature of the film—more impressive even than Tracy's virile performance or Director King Vidor's flair for realism in blood-letting—is the technicolour photography, which paints the woods and lakes of the northwest in such lovely tints that they bring home, even more forcibly than the story, the realisation that only man is vile.

If you like adventure stories, this should be your meat—very red meat.

I WAS AN ADVENTURESS

(20th Century Fox)

HOLLYWOOD is showing further signs of having discovered ballet. Recently we had "Florian" in which Baronova was given a chance to prove to filmgoers that ballet is a little more than a series of rotations in an abbreviated skirt. Then came Zorina in "On Your Toes," and now comes Zorina again in "I Was an Adventuress" which, although it is chiefly concerned with the escapade of a couple of confidence tricksters and an ex-jewel thief, diverts suddenly into the beautiful "Swan Lake" ballet.

Zorina was one of several brilliant baby ballet stars discovered some years ago on the Continent. Irina Baronova and Tatiana Riabouchinska, who have both toured New Zealand, were two others. The fragile Riabouchinska has stuck to ballet; Baronova also remained faithful until, presumably, the fact that the European centres of ballet were more preoccupied with blitzkriegs and air raids, brought her to Hollywood. Zorina went straight to Hollywood via Broadway.

But to return to "I Was an Adventuress." Zorina is the fake Countess Vronsky, most important member of a trio of jewel thieves and confidence tricksters who work the better-class pleasure resorts of Europe. Unfortunately the Countess falls in love with and marries one of her victims, so the other two (who are Erich von Stronheim and Peter Lorre) get to work on the ex-Countess.

There are unpleasant complications—after all it's hardly comfortable to have a house full of friends and relations systematically robbed by one of your guests and not be able to say a word about it. But true love irons out every wrinkle, and apparently reformed jewel thieves can make delightful wives.

Zorina has more acting and less dancing to do than in any previous picture and comes through well. She has good looks and undoubted personality—an American magazine described her as "handicapped by facial evidences of intelligence."

But the pleasantest surprises are our old friends Erich von Stronheim and Peter Lorre, as sinister a couple of rogues as ever picked a pocket of solid paste diamonds.

Lorre, whom Hollywood has hardly treated as well as he deserves, is a truly pathological case, unable to resist the simplest thievery, but doing it all with the most charming, self-deprecating air.

We almost forgot to mention that Zorina dances delightfully, and that the extract from "Swan Lake" is superbly mounted. But why not give us the whole ballet?

We also forgot to mention Richard Greene—but that's excusable.

THE LADY IN QUESTION

(Columbia)

NOT a very great deal happens in this picture, and what does happen is not what should happen from the viewpoint of dramatic construction, but in spite of this it contrives to hold the interest, thanks to a certain quaintness of atmosphere and direction and a clever piece of semi-humorous character acting by Brian Aherne. He's a middle-aged Persian shop-keeper, soft-hearted, sentimental but shrewd about some things. To his unbowed delight he sits on the jury at a murder trial, is instrumental in securing the acquittal of the accused, a girl (Rita Hayworth) charged with killing her lover. Then, without disclosing her identity he gives her a job, takes her into his family. Her presence causes disruption and jealousy; the son of the house becomes infatuated and steals from his father. Everything is working up to a situation where, by a sardonic twist, the girl will be killed by her protector and he himself will stand trial for murder. I'll bet my boots that is what happened in the play from which the film is taken, and, dramatically, it would have been a neat climax. But Columbia, by keeping the girl alive and white-washing her, has sacrificed neatness and dramatic effect for the sake of the happy ending. It's an intriguing little show all the same.



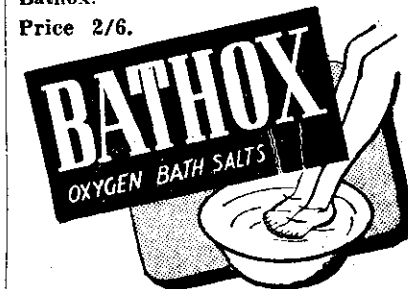
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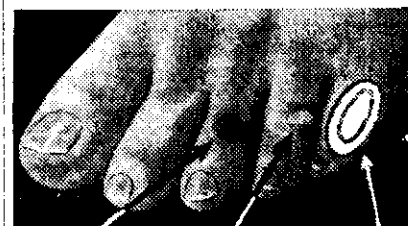
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(Continued from previous page)
are people who hate the boss, and like good food and sleep-in on Saturday mornings; who are sometimes irritable, and sometimes feel that if only they could get the machine at home on the kitchen floor they could make it work. That's ourselves wanting to know each other, knowing sometimes that the films could help us there, wondering then why, in the name of democracy, they are still fiddling while London burns.