

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

NICE GIRL?

(Universal)

 It has taken Deanna Durbin nine films and four years to develop from a smart girl into a nice girl with a question mark, and the process has been as profitable to her producers as it has been pleasing to her audiences. But although she celebrated the completion of her ninth picture by getting married, nine is apparently not her lucky number. Or at least it is not as lucky as Nos. 1 to 8 inclusive, though I don't want it to sound as if I'm suggesting that the failure of *Nice Girl?* to come quite up to standard will make Deanna a back number. It's just that the standard has been so high that any falling off is pretty noticeable.

The fault is not really Deanna's, but that of her producer, Joe Pasternak, who has made her the star of a rather aimless comedy of small-town life of the *Four Daughters—Four Wives* pattern which, from the point of view of plot and incident, is quite unworthy of the talent that has been lavished upon it. Besides Walter Brennan and Helen Broderick, this talent includes Robert Benchley, who appears as the slightly harassed but determinedly cheerful widowed father of three bouncing daughters, of whom Deanna is one. He also breeds rabbits, in order to write a treatise on the effects of diet. This is truly a small-town assignment for the bland and cosmopolitan Mr. Benchley who is always seen at his best in a perpetually semi-sozzled condition, whereas in this present role he could win a blue ribbon for temperance. Franchot Tone is almost as much a fish out of water as a dashing young scientist who descends on the Benchley household and causes romantic palpitations among the three man-mad daughters.

Not content with being, as she says, litter-perfect in the habits of rabbits, Deanna seeks more worldly knowledge and by sundry devices, such as sticking a potato in the exhaust pipe of a car, manages at last to find herself satisfactorily compromised with the knowledgeable Mr. Tone. Hence the question mark in the title. Fortunately Mr. Tone is a nice man without question, and after the story has gone to extremes of absurdity to save her reputation, the young heroine ends up almost as innocent as she started. Indeed, although they let her put on some fairly heavy make-up (including a pair of arched eye-brows) and a siren's dress for the big seduction scene which ends in fiasco, Universal are still rather diffident even about letting their precious Deanna be



MRS. VAUGHN PAUL

As Deanna Durbin she is still not kissed seriously in public

kissed seriously in public. However, now that she's Mrs. Vaughn Paul one may expect them to relax a bit more.

The story has its sparkling moments—quite a number of them—but it lacks the wealth of musical and spectacular sequences which we have come to expect from a Durbin picture and which compensate for thinness of plot. She does sing, of course, several times—but it must be confessed that her highly-boostered rendering of "There'll Always Be An England" is just an afterthought. Obviously some bright lad at Universal had the idea of tacking it on after the picture had been made in order to catch British Empire trade. Deanna sings the number quite well, I don't deny, but personally, I object to any such commercialising of patriotic sentiment.

ROAD SHOW

(United Artists)



HERE is a droll, diverting trifle, to be recommended if you like your entertainment escapist (see recent controversy on subject). John Hubbard is a wealthy young man who doesn't like the girl he is going to marry, and escapes by playing insane at the wedding ceremony. Justifiably piqued, the girl biffs him on the head, sends him off to a mental hospital. This hospital is charmingly disguised as the Hopedale Club ("For the Rest of Your Life") and is peopled by a number of delightful lunatics, including Adolphe Menjou as

Colonel Carlton Carroway ("You've heard of Carroway seed? I'm head of the world corporation. I came here to get away from it all"). Unaccountably at liberty is Mr. Menjou's nephew, Charles Butterworth, who likes to ride everywhere in a fire engine.

Making their escape from the mental hospital, Mr. Hubbard and the Colonel join up with a travelling circus run by the attractive Carole Landis. There, after a series of events which serve to prove that nearly everybody participating should be confined at the Hopedale Club, Mr. Hubbard is finally billed as Drogo the Lion-Tamer. Demonstrating the effect which true love can have on a susceptible young man, he not only tames a whole cage full of lions, but also buys Miss Landis a brand new circus.

From the opening shot of John Hubbard bolting from the altar and sitting in the vestry bleating like a sheep, to the final fade-out of an Indian brave proposing to Patsy Kelly by picture writing, it is insane comedy of a high order. Menjou, with his capacity for getting into trouble and his automatic-camera-cum-three-thimble game, supplies much of the humour, but Director Hal Roach has astutely thrown in every Aid of Entertainment he could think of. Mr. Roach, indeed, provides an object lesson in the direction of this sort of comedy. In one sequence he lets it slide into the equivalent of custard-pie throwing, but gathers it up again immediately with tight reins.

The musical side is embellished with three songs by Hoagy Carmichael. Incredible as it may sound to the uninitiated, the name of Hoagy (*Deep Purple*) Carmichael means something in Tin Pan Alley, and his contributions to *Road Show* are smooth and pleasant.

Typical scene: John Hubbard, with whip and kitchen chair, "taming" Adolph Menjou, who roars at him like any lion.

MOON OVER BURMA

(Paramount)



MOON OVER BURMA would, in my opinion, have been more like a total eclipse had it not been for one good actor and one or two fairly good scenes. The actor is Albert Basserman, and while I think he is wasted in such stuff as this, he certainly made it bearable. By contrast, Dorothy Lamour is inconspicuous—historically, I mean, and she hasn't even a sarong to help things along.

It's the old, old story of one woman and two men Behind the Beyond—this time in Burma, though I wouldn't have recognised it without the theme song. It didn't look a bit like the pictures in the geographical magazines. There are two themes; one is, of course, the romance and the other the plotting of the badmen to bring about the ruin of the hero and his partners. This dirty work is frustrated in the nick of time by — well,

Theatres Must Not Debar Critics

New York State drama critics are assured of admission to theatres, no matter how "unfavourably" they report performances, under a bill signed on May 1 by Governor Herbert H. Lehman. The new statute makes it unlawful to eject from or refuse admission to a public entertainment to any person over 21 years of age who presents a ticket before the performance begins. Democratic Assemblyman Irwin D. Davidson, New York City, sponsor of the measure, said it was designed to "prevent exclusion from theatres of drama critics just because they write unfavourably of performances."

who could it be but little Dotty? She is a night club singer in Rangoon, rescued from the too pressing attentions of her manager by Robert Preston, one of three partners in a teak plantation. The others are Preston Foster and Albert Basserman (who is blind). Dotty arrives in the jungle with one suitcase, which evidently has the capacity of a good-sized cabin trunk if one is to judge by the number of costumes it produces for her during the remainder of the film. She decides that what the place wants is the touch of a woman's hand, but her efforts aren't too successful, and the sight of her tottering through the compound in six-inch heels and a sun-suit is rather too much for the natives. However, all is well in the end, as you may suppose.

Basserman, as the blind man, is the only outstanding member of the cast, and he has one good fight in the dark and armed only with a stock-whip, against the principal villain. I enjoyed that, but on the whole I found the film tedious; it whiled away about an hour and a-half and seemed a little longer.

CALL A COP

(B.E.F.)



FIVE comic songs, with acrobatic interludes, are strung together by a slender thread of story in an endeavour to provide the audience with two hours of laughter. They succeed in raising a few surreptitious giggles when George Formby obliges with a risqué song, a number of guffaws when he rolls down a slope in a barrel and when he gives his boss an unexpected ride on a motorbike; but for the most part you can spend your time more advantageously studying the psychology of a motion-picture audience endeavouring to assert its control over sticky sweets and chocolates.

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