

FILM REVIEWS

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he finally arrives at work a gentleman waits upon him to tell him that owing to a geographical-cum-typographical error he and Mrs. Smith are not legally married and never have been, and returns him the two dollars that he paid for his "marriage" licence. With this minor sidelight on the legal complications of life in the U.S., I can leave the stage set and leave you to enjoy the story at first hand.

Carole Lombard is in her element as Mrs. Smith and it is difficult to tell whether it is her clowning or Alfred Hitchcock's direction that is responsible for so many clever and amusing scenes. Montgomery is at his best but it is Lombard's picture. I must confess, though, that for me the surprise of the evening was Gene Raymond. He has, as they say in the U.S. "matooored" and has become so much a dyed-in-the-wool actor that I didn't at first recognise him. The fact that, with dark hair, he appeared to be literally dyed-in-the-wool probably helped to mystify me. There was one delightful sequence when he and Montgomery indulged in some mutual back-slapping and here Raymond's clever timing was quite worthy of Olivier himself.

One scene did jar a little on me, when Carole Lombard seized handfuls of snow and rubbed them ecstatically (but carefully) over her face. Years ago, Garbo did the same thing much better in *Queen Christina*, and for a more practical reason, and Miss Lombard lost somewhat in the comparison. However, you will remember innumerable clever touches when you have forgotten this rather awkward moment; you will remember Montgomery being shaved, the cat that wouldn't eat the soup, the under-the-table scene at breakfast with Carole Lombard's bare feet tucked up the legs of her husband's trousers, and a dozen others. I think you will like *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*. I certainly did.

DOWN ARGENTINE WAY

(20th Cent.-Fox)



Down Argentine Way is an entertainment for the eye rather than for the ear or for the bewildered modern brain. At no stage did it pep up the emotions, comic or tragic, but it maintained an even tenor of pleasant enjoyment right from the opening shot of Carmen Miranda to the grand finale where everyone married and lived happily ever after. That is why I liked it.

The plot was never good—in this type of picture, which is really a series of cleverly presented vaudeville acts, we don't expect it to be. It was a comic opera plot, with a stubborn father refusing to allow his son to go places with the daughter of his age-old enemy until the misunderstanding was cleared up in the orthodox place—the end of the third act—and with the impetuous rich girl chartering a 'plane for a 6000-mile flight, merely to slap the hero's face. There are many flaws in it, but they don't obtrude, and there is no need to look for them if you don't want to.

The acts were excellent. Highlight was of course Carmen Miranda. Contrary to expectation, she wore layer

upon layer (or so it seemed) of bizarre-looking garments—probably in anticipation of the frigid New Zealand winter. But although this hoard of apparel evidently prevented her from accomplishing the acrobatic congas for which she is famous—and I was duly disappointed—her singing well rewarded the patience of waiting half the picture before she appeared for any length of time. Then of course, there were the usual native tap dancers, guitarists, conga partners—all first class entertainers in their own particular field.

The spectacle did not come from the music, however. There were no great choruses or orchestras, the dancing was seldom en masse. It was as though the director (Irving Cummings) aimed at making his audience sit in its seat, take notice, even clap, but to be comfortable there and not have to jump up in an outburst of enthusiasm. He did it by using colour effects, never quite natural, but always pleasing and harmonious. There were shots of Buenos Aires itself, of a very Spanish hacienda, sequences amid the geometric patterns of night-clubs, a veritable fashion parade of the best 1941 dresses—or so I'm told—and plenty of blue to turn romance out in the right colour.

Even the comedy did not play its usual prominent part. It was there, it is true, but administered in gentle doses that did little more than put me in a good humour. There were very few of those hearty guffaws in which the New Zealand public so loves to indulge. Tito, the professional guide, who showed Betty Grable the hot spots of the capital (they're not very hot) in place of the Ambassador, and the few Indian figures (who looked a little out of place amid such sumptuous surroundings) obliged with idiosyncrasies. Charlotte Greenwood, as Binnie Crawford, Betty Grable's aunt, was her usual bouncing self—she reminded me of Tigger in the "House of Pooh Corner"—and even bounced into a few dances. Believe it or not, she can dance quite well.

Then, of course, the hero and the heroine—not quite comic characters. They never rose to heights of acting genius—they didn't have to. Don Ameche was a real Don, though not as handsome in technicolour as in black and white; and Betty Grable made a very attractive model for very attractive frocks.

I wish I could believe life down Argentine way was quite as rosy as it was painted in this picture. If I did, I'd copy Betty Grable, and jump in the first 'plane available.

SECOND CHORUS

(Paramount)



ONE cold wet evening about ten or eleven years ago, I drifted into a little second-run theatre that was showing, as far as I could make out through the mist, a film starring Jeanette MacDonald. I knew nothing whatever about the film, but I had an hour or so to fill in and I thought I might as well spend it listening to Jeanette singing, and there might even be an orchestra as well. But there wasn't a chirp from Miss MacDonald throughout the entire performance, and the only music I

heard was the National Anthem. I have forgotten the name of the film, if I ever knew it, in fact I had forgotten the whole incident until, as I came away from *Second Chorus* I was suddenly back ten years, cold and wet and thoroughly annoyed at having been, as I considered, let down.

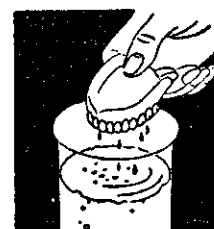
All this may not seem to have very much to do with *Second Chorus*, Fred Astaire and Paulette Goddard. But very much the same thing happened to me with this production. I wanted and expected to see Astaire dance. I was also anxious to see Astaire and Goddard dance together, as advertised. I saw one short number in which they appeared together, one other very short dance by Astaire alone and finally one longer sequence in the old Astaire manner, forming the climax of the film. These were neatly spaced—beginning, middle and end—and the time dragged between them. My criticism of *Second Chorus* is this: Here is a dancer with an immense following, a man who is a good light comedy actor, but who is first and foremost a dancer, with no equal. Here is a film that could easily have been made a dancing film, but evidently Paramount, having engaged Artie Shaw and the band, decided to concentrate on swing. That may be all very well for swing fans perhaps, but not for Astaire followers.

Paulette Goddard struggles with a weak part and Burgess Meredith does his best to help things along, but it is heavy going for him. I expect swing enthusiasts will enjoy *Second Chorus*—I nearly wrote *Second Fiddle*, which, to my mind seems to fit the film better. I have occasionally listened in awe to a swing band session over the air, when the bands are dissected and discussed by an evident authority; but swing means little to me and I must admit that I spent considerable time, while enthusiasts sat rapt about me, groping under the seat for a small, elusive, but eminently desirable (for I had gone without my lunch to see this film) piece of toffee!

"DON QUIXOTE," which was last filmed with Chaliapin in the title role and George Robey as Sancho Panza, may be done again with Frank Capra and Robert Riskin as producers.

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