

FILM REVIEWS

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This Thing Called Love is bright, farcial entertainment—particularly if you like the comedy styles of Rosalind Russell and Melvyn Douglas. They work well in partnership.

THE CIRCUS

(Mosfilm)

WELLINGTON is having a season of Continental films once again. It is welcome news to picture-goers, who are beginning to get a little critical (and who doesn't, at some time or another?), of Hollywood's endless variations on the same old themes. Presumably the showing of a Soviet-made film within such a short time of the new alignment has its political implications, too; in any case, it helps to illustrate how quickly and adroitly some people must be prepared to shift their positions these uncertain days.

The Circus is probably the best Russian film that could have been chosen to open the season. True, it has no English captions to aid the picturegoer stumbling in the darkness of the Russian language, but the story is so simply and directly told that this doesn't matter much. More important, *The Circus* is light and bright and well laced with comedy, which may serve to reassure some people who think that all Soviet films are sombre, heavy-footed vehicles for Communist propaganda.

There is a certain amount of propaganda, but it is not propaganda for any particular brand of politics. The moral which the story points, very carefully and subtly, is that a child, whatever the circumstances of its birth and whether it be white, black, or the result of union between white and black, is a human being, and just as entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as you and I. Which is good Christian philosophy whichever way you look at it.

In this instance, the producers of *The Circus* have gone as far as claiming that it is uncharitable to criticise a white woman for having a child by a black man. People who find their eyebrows rising at this can dismiss it, if they like, as merely the Soviet way of solving the many problems of race and colour within the borders of the U.S.S.R.

The story is a simple one. A white woman who has a child by an American negro, flees from racial persecution in company with a German circus artist, who shares her secret and befriends her. In Moscow, the woman falls in love with a Red Army officer, son of a circus manager. The German (who has, by the way, a resemblance to Anthony Eden, which one can only describe as unfortunate), is thereupon enraged, and threatens to reveal her secret. When he is finally persuaded that her love is indeed another's, he does betray her, but to her surprise the audience, good Soviet citizens all, laugh and hiss at him, acclaim the woman and her Red Army lover, and sing old Russian cradle songs to the kinky-haired child.

The acting, particularly that of the three main players, is of a high standard, though it is difficult at times not to laugh at the sheer villainy of the Anthony Edenish German. In part, it is recognisable as the application of a technique for which certain great directors of

the Moscow theatre have become widely renowned. The hero, for instance, elated at the discovery that the beautiful circus star really does love him, turns cartwheels and somersaults to express his joy; the villain, having laid a particularly mean trap, wraps his cloak dramatically around him and vanishes into thin air. Tricks not as obvious and un-subtle as one might think.

It is hard to know how to rate *The Circus* from the point of view of entertainment, so we will leave our little man just sitting in his seat, and if you like, you can imagine that he has a non-committal look on his face. Myself, I enjoyed it.

ADAM HAD FOUR SONS

(Columbia)

ADAM (Warner Baxter) not only had four sons, but also a wife, a young Continental governess, a large house, a fat bank account, and several cars.

For myself, I'd be willing to settle for the governess. She is Ingrid Bergman, the Swedish actress who made her debut about a year ago opposite Leslie Howard in *Intermezzo* and hasn't been seen since. Why Hollywood has neglected her in the meantime I can't understand, because she has intelligence as well as good looks, and there is an intensity in her acting which gives interest to the most stiltedly melodramatic situations (of which there are a good number in this picture).

As for Adam, it takes him much more than a year to become fully aware of Miss Bergman's qualities; it takes him, in fact, from just before the stock market crash on Wall Street in 1907 until just after Great War 1. In the meantime he has lost his worldly goods (but regains them thanks to the war boom), and his wife, and has had a packet of trouble from his sons. Except for one brief period when she is sent back to the Continent while Adam reconquers Wall Street, the governess remains throughout these trying times (they are also rather trying for the audience) as a benign influence in the family, acting as a kind of shock-absorber between Adam and adversity. Chief serpent in Adam's garden is Susan Hayward who, as the wife of one of his sons, is responsible for at least half the grey hairs which appear in Warner Baxter's make-up toward the end of the picture. She makes nasty mischief between the brothers, plots to oust the governess from the garden. But in the end it is the governess who shows the serpent the exit.

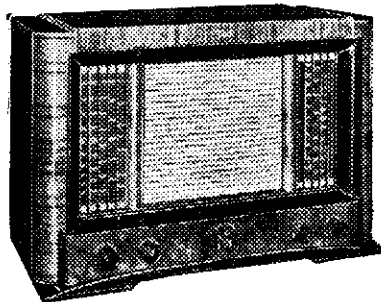
Enlivened though it occasionally is by the minxing of Susan Hayward, *Adam Had Four Sons* would be a very dreary family chronicle were it not for the personality of Ingrid Bergman.

Cure For Homesickness

DID you hear the story of the seargeant who went into a London tea-shop, sat down and ordered a cup of lukewarm tea and a plate of stale bread and butter, and a slightly musty boiled egg? The waitress asked him twice to make sure. When she brought it he asked, "And would you do me a favour Miss; would you sit down just for a minute and nag at me?" She said, "I will, if you want me to, but why?" He said, "I'm feeling homesick."—The BBC Listener.

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