

## FILM REVIEWS

By G.M.

(Continued from previous page)

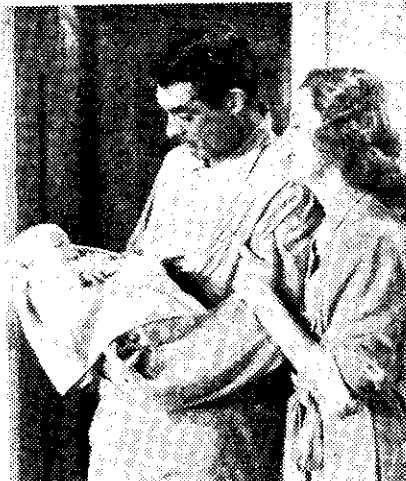
the producer and star, had been content with one or two novelties, he might have got away with it at the box-office. Instead he has wallowed in sensationism as much as William Randolph Hearst ever did. He has thrown away all the old clichés of camera presentation, has evolved new techniques of story-telling, photography, and recording. In some respects, *Citizen Kane* is more like a radio play than a movie, with sound used as an integral part of the dramatic development, often lifting the audience almost out of their seats with sudden switches from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*. In some respects it is more like a *March of Time* or a newsreel than a film drama. But mostly *Citizen Kane* is just itself, unclassifiable.

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I HAVE said that if Orson Welles had confined himself to a few novelties he might have had a better chance with a picture-going public that is traditionally timid about revolutions; and indeed, speaking purely as a critic who is not for the moment interested in the box-office, I'll go further and say that Mr. Welles has often been guilty of showing off, has been just a little too clever. There is no harm, indeed there may sometimes be much value, in saying a thing twice or three times, as Mr. Welles often does, if repetition is worth while; but I imagine this bright young man rather revelled in the prospect of making us jump half out of our skins every now and then with his repeated trick of dropping the sound to a whisper and then raising it to a bellow. There is an amazing and praiseworthy depth in all the photography, but it was not really necessary, except to prove what an original fellow he is, for Mr. Welles to insist on photographing nearly every sequence so that the camera takes in both the floor and ceiling and all between is distorted to our vision. And it is quite impossible, even for Mr. Welles, to have two distinct centres of action and interest in the one scene and expect that we shall be able to take them both in at once. (This is different from gaining an effect from simultaneous action on several contiguous planes, as for instance you sometimes get in a cross-section of life in a block of flats, for here the interest is intentionally diffused).

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YET if I was sometimes annoyed by Mr. Welles's exhibitionism, I was more often fascinated by the wealth of his ingenuity. His biography of Kane (with himself acting the title role) really does give the effect of a man's life in its wholeness, as distinct from the mere facade which Hollywood so often puts up. Like one of the elaborate jig-saw puzzles with which Kane's second wife ekes out her boredom in the immensity of her husband's grotesque castle, the pieces of the life-story are picked out apparently at random, one minute from childhood, the next from old age, but at last they all fit together, and the pattern of a man's life is complete—complete in all its pettiness, cruelty, disharmony and frustration, its



SON AND HEIR: Cary Grant, Irene Dunne and another in Columbia's "Penny Serenade" for early release

generosity, ambition, friendliness, and romanticism. And at the end, whatever you may think of William Randolph Hearst, you can hardly help but have some sympathy for the spiritual loneliness of Charles Foster Kane, dying in a junk-heap of the world's art treasures. A man with millions of dollars and millions of enemies, he wanted only to be loved—but on his own terms.

Such a moral judgment is, however, rather out of place; for the essence of the narrative is perhaps its impartiality. Here is the evidence, it says, given by a series of witnesses, each of whom knew some side of the character of this man who founded an empire of yellow journalism. Listen to their stories and form your own conclusions. It will not be easy, for to the onlooker a man's life does not appear as a thread running smoothly from birth to death, but rather as a series of overlapping, haphazard impressions. But it can be done, and the camera, prying here, probing there, will help you.

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THUS, inevitably, one returns from the story itself to the method of telling it. Note, for example, that although he appears in scene after scene, you see nothing but the shadowy back of the reporter of "News Marches On" (the barely-disguised *March of Time*), whose search for the meaning of Kane's mysterious last word "rosebud," motivates the story. (You don't see more, because he is only an incidental character). Note also with what finality the camera, with one brief shot of two stage-hands, disposes of all Kane's dreams of operatic success for his second wife. Note also—but if I were to record all the technical tricks of this picture, I'd be at my typewriter till daylight (and it is now nearly 3 a.m.). Orson Welles may seem at the moment rather like a child with a new toy. But he will grow up, and so will movie audiences. And of this I am sure, that years from now other film producers and technicians will still be tilling the ground which he has broken in *Citizen Kane*.

### TOPPER RETURNS

(United Artists)



WHEN I set out to review this picture, I felt that there would really be little for me to say about it. I felt that it would probably only be necessary to point out that it was a repetition of the

popular *Topper* theme, the poor bewildered little man pestered by an annoying and persistent female ghost, doing his utmost to escape from the consequences of a series of compromising and fast-moving situations. However, I soon found out, not entirely to my pleasure, that there is a little more to it than that.

The trials of *Topper*, it is true, are still an important and amusing theme, but, as might be expected, a theme which is not as successful as when first introduced some years ago. Billie Burke's fatuous remarks, her shrill demands to be told why her husband is sitting in the ice chest, or who the invisible female companion is in his bedroom, begin after a while to irritate. The ghost (Joan Blondell) invisibly leaves visible foot-prints or smokes visible cigarettes, just as did her predecessor—her tricks are no longer new, thought often still funny.

The producers seem to have realised that, to make a success out of a well-worn theme, considerable genius is required. But they have attempted to remedy the matter by introducing, not directive genius, but another well-worn theme, that of *The Cat and the Canary*, with secret passages, a murder or two, midnight prowlers, the eeriness of a big black lonely home. There also seemed to be an attempt to repeat *The Cat and the Canary*'s signal success of bringing comedy into sharp relief with horror.

Perhaps I have mistaken the theme, and it was meant to be a satire on horror films. Certainly, nobody was awestruck at the cloaked murderer with the witch's cap, or frightened by the solemn-faced maid, appropriately dubbed "Rebecca" by the bombastic police sergeant, or the other atmospheric tricks in the bag. Photographic skill was much in evidence in the comic scenes, but in the tragic ones failed dismally.

But it would be unfair to harp on this note of censure. Many of the situations are crazy in the extreme, and the facial expressions of the negro chauffeur are delightful—particularly the utter misery that appears on his broad face when the seal gently but firmly pushes him with the monotony of pure rhythm back into icy water. For those who had the misfortune to miss the previous *Topper* pictures or *The Cat and the Canary*, *Topper Returns* will still be very entertaining comedy.



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