

# SPEAKING CANDIDLY

## THE GIRL IN THE NEWS

(M.G.M. British)

WHEN war broke out, there were many of us who expressed the not unnatural view that it would mean another grave set-back to the British film industry, and that Hollywood might as a result be finally entrenched in an unchallengeable position. Without wanting to argue that the war is a Good Thing or a blessing in disguise to the British studios, I am not so sure now that we were right. Several recent British films—for example, *Pimpernel Smith*, *The Farmer's Wife*, *Quiet Wedding*, *Major Barbara*, and now *The Girl in the News*—suggest that the war has had a cathartic effect on the industry, has purged it of some of the ills from which it was suffering and which, incidentally, still afflict Hollywood to some extent. For one thing, the surfeit of minor producing companies, which resulted in a rush of low-grade "quickies" (particularly those awful musical-comedies) to supply the requirements of the pernicious Quota System, has now been removed, and only a comparatively few studios remain in active production. (An echo of those old days of multitudinous overlapping enterprises is perhaps to be found in the fact that *The Girl in the News* is described as a Twentieth Century Feature, produced by Gaumont British and released by M.G.M.). Forced by the war to limit quantity, British producers in general have made an improvement in quality. It might almost be said that they are taking their job more seriously. Without having become pre-occupied with war themes, and without having forgotten that entertainment is still their main purpose, they are choosing their subject-matter more carefully, and are making the best use of their available manpower and resources.

I have cited *The Girl in the News* as an example, and it is a good one. The story is the first consideration, direction

is the second, and the performances of a first-rate cast fit neatly into the pattern of the plot. The drama (a murder conspiracy) develops in a court-room atmosphere and includes two of those trial sequences in which British films nearly

### Wish Fulfilled

#### "Warsaw Concerto"

IN my review of the film "*Dangerous Moonlight*," I expressed the hope that Richard Addinsell's "*Warsaw Symphony*" (actually it's a concerto) which forms a musical background to the story, had been recorded separately and would be heard some time on the air. A correspondent (R. J. Lane, Auckland) now writes to tell me that a 12-inch record of the "*Warsaw Concerto*" (Columbia DX 1062) was issued in England last January, having been taken off the sound-track of the film. So we may hear it on the radio here some time.

The BBC's "*Radio Times*" of March 6 also reports a great demand for this concerto—"one of the rare examples of a piece of film music that can stand on its own." Richard Addinsell has composed musical scores for several other British films, including "*Fire Over England*," "*South Riding*," "*The Amateur Gentleman*," and "*Good-bye Mr. Chips*."

always excel. Perhaps this is true only of British audiences, but somehow the dispassionate procedure of a British court of justice, with its solemnity of wigs, gowns, and legal language, seems to heighten the underlying tension of the human emotions involved far more than a similar scene in an American setting, where the drama is much more on the surface.

However, even with two sessions of the Assizes in the one picture, the director, Carol Reed, has not given us too much of a good thing. His choice of detail to provide local colour and build up suspense is just as clever in the opening scenes where a neurotic invalid accidentally dies of poisoning and later in those where another invalid is murdered, as it is in those scenes in which Nurse Graham (Margaret Lockwood) twice faces a jury as a result of these deaths. In both cases she is, of course, innocent and is acquitted in the first without much exertion on the part of her counsel (Barry K. Barnes). But when the nurse is involved in a second poisoning case, in exactly similar circumstances and for apparently similar motives, it requires a daring bluff by counsel to reveal that she is the victim of a diabolically clever conspiracy, the real murderers having used the first charge against her to make it almost impossible for her to escape the second. When I mention that Emlyn Williams portrays one of the villains of the piece and that he is at his villainous best, you may have an even better idea of the quality of this exciting and worthwhile film.

## HELLZAPOPPIN

(Universal)



"ANY similarity between *Hellzapoppin* and a motion picture is purely coincidental," says the foreword, and it is to be taken at least

as seriously as anything else in this mad-house production. From all accounts the similarity to a motion picture is rather closer than was the similarity of the original *Hellzapoppin* to a stage production when it made the all-time record for a musical show on Broadway by running for 1,404 performances to a total of nearly 5,000,000 customers; but it is still sufficiently distant to keep a movie audience wondering what on earth can happen next. In the stage show, half the cast spent most of their time off the stage careering around the auditorium: they can't do that in the film, but they come as near to it as possible by shouting insults and instructions from the screen to the audience ("Go home at once, Stinky, your mother wants you!") by arguing with the operator in the projection-box, and by censoring themselves at intervals. Other idiocies include a lost soul who wanders in and out of the picture with a plant in a flower-pot which has grown into a large tree by the end of the show; another lost soul named Lena who rushes around shouting for somebody named Oscar; running the film backwards and sometimes upside down as well; characters who travel from one movie setting to another, change costumes as they go, and unearth many curiosities, including a little sledge symbolically labelled "Rosebud."

The fount and origin of all this insanity are two vaudeville comedians named John Sigvard Olsen and Harold Ogden Johnson. Having made what I hope was their fortune with their Broadway show they have now transferred their undoubted but very curious talents to the screen and have presented what they tell us is "a picture about a picture about *Hellzapoppin*." Which is as good a description as any other, for any attempt at a lucid explanation of this frantic extravaganza is as hopeless as

attempting to explain the state of the world or an exhibition of Modern Art—both of which cataclysms *Hellzapoppin* rather strikingly resembles. One might, of course, be severely practical and say that the film is merely a colossal hotch-potch of all the vaudeville gags, stunts, and skits of the past 50 years, plus all the camera-tricks that have ever been thought of; or one might go all "arty" and say that this is Surrealism in its Cinematic Form. Either way, it is perhaps some consolation that *Hellzapoppin* is hardly more crazy than the world in which it was produced.

One fact is, however, certain—that this film is unique, and it's up to you to decide whether that is an advantage. Not that you will be able to decide at once. For the first quarter-hour you will be wondering whether you haven't by some chance come to a lunatic asylum instead of a picture theatre, and thereafter, having abandoned the attempt to find rhyme or reason anywhere (let alone a connected plot) you will probably be too busy laughing at the lunacy to do much thinking, as Olsen and Johnson caper about in company with Mischa Auer, Hugh Herbert, Martha Raye, and other half and quarter-wits. For, in spite of the fact that some of the gags misfire, most of them go off with a bang.

If it is true that a little nonsense now and then is relished by the wisest men, then we may expect *Hellzapoppin* to attract all the wiseacres in the country, who will undoubtedly be found rolling in the aisles. After that it is perhaps hardly modest of me to mention that there were times when even I found it difficult to keep my seat.

## MOON OVER MIAMI

(20th Century-Fox)



THE last time the moon rose over Miami it was three years ago and it wasn't in colour. The film was then called *Three Blind Mice*, and it starred Loretta Young, Joel McCrea, and David Niven; and in spite of the picture-postcard prettiness of this new technicolour version, seven song numbers, Betty Grable and her much-publicised torso, and the expenditure of one million dollars by Producer Darryl Zanuck, it was in my opinion a brighter and more successful venture.

Aligned with Miss Grable now are Carole Landis and the long-legged Charlotte Greenwood—three working girls who proceed on the theory that since it is as easy to fall in love with a millionaire as a truck-driver, it might as well be a millionaire. Miss Grable is chosen to put the theory to the test, using a small legacy as capital, the other two girls as assistants, and a luxurious Miami hotel as hunting-ground. Their theory is supported to this extent: Miss Grable does fall properly in love with a millionaire (Don Ameche) and he with her, but for practical purposes the enterprise seems doomed to failure, since it transpires that he has just lost all his money. However, another more fortunate millionaire (Robert Cummings) is conveniently at hand to fall in love at the right moment with Miss Landis, so a fairly substantial return on the girls' outlay appears to be assured. Concerning the prospects of Mr. Zanuck, I am not quite so sanguine.



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