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Film Reviews by G.M.

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

ROXIE HART

(20th Century Fox)



LIKE *The Talk of the Town*, *Design for Scandal*, and many another Hollywood film, *Roxie Hart* does not treat the American legal system with

the dignity it possibly deserves. On the contrary it suggests that Justice is not a virtuous female with bandaged eyes but a bawdy old fellow with one eye closed in a wink and the other wide open and cocked at a shapely pair of legs. But then *Roxie Hart* is a farce about Chicago 20 years ago, when almost anything was liable to happen and it was apparently easier for a pretty woman to get away with first-degree murder than it was for a plain one to get a seat in a street car.

"No need to worry; this county wouldn't hang even Lucrezia Borgia," *Roxie Hart*, a vaudeville dancer (Ginger Rogers) is told by a reporter when her lover is found shot dead in her flat and her guilty husband accuses her of the crime. Assured of acquittal by her press-agents and her lawyer (Adolphe Menjou) and promised enough front-page publicity to put her on easy street for life, she stakes her legs against her neck, pleads guilty, and faces a susceptible male jury and a judge who likes the limelight almost as much as she does. The trial is a riot, but no less uproarious are the preliminaries when *Roxie* herself holds court in the jailhouse for her admirers and backers. A virago named Two-Gun Gertie temporarily threatens to steal her thunder, whereupon *Roxie* recaptures the headlines by pretending that she is about to become a mother. After that the jury's decision is never in doubt, but the fun does not slacken, with Ginger Rogers, Menjou, Lynne Overman and the others playing their parts for all they are worth, and a bit over. If anything the farce gets a little out of hand: there are times when some restraint would have been more effective.

When a story is told in retrospect, as this one is, its chief purpose is usually to arouse a nostalgic regret in the on-looker for the "good old days" which it portrays. *Roxie Hart* will provoke no such emotion, but only laughter.

CALLING DR. GILLESPIE



THE sad case-history of a young man who dislikes train whistles and Dr. Lionel Barrymore Gillespie so intensely that he goes mad and

upsets hospital routine by wandering at large with the Big Muscle Scalpel. Dr. Gerneide (the Dutch actor Philip Dorn), acting as *locum tenens* for Young Dr. Kildare (the conscientious objector Lew Ayes), prevents undue bloodshed. Symptoms: weak pulse, general debility. Diagnosis: the subject is played out. Treatment: long rest.

Two Letters

"MR. DAVIS."

Sir,—Are you or your film critic, "G.M." able to explain to me why the British film *The Next of Kin* is being shown to the New Zealand public under the title of *Mr. Davis*? The film has been highly praised by both British and American critics, and "G.M." himself

devoted a great deal of space to his review of it. I know quite a number of people who have been waiting for its release here, and they have all been surprised to learn that it is being advertised and screened as though it were just another spy melodrama. Surely this is rather a comedown, for the film was intended to convey the urgency of the warning "Don't Talk."

P.M.H. (Wellington).

[When this letter was referred to R. L. Grant, general manager of Theatre Management Ltd., the company which is handling the exhibition of the film in New Zealand, he said: "If we had tried to sell it straight out as a Don't Talk-propaganda film, it wouldn't have lasted more than a few days at a second-grade theatre, whereas, presented as it has been as *Mr. Davis*, it has run three weeks in Wellington, something certainly never done by a propaganda film before. The public just don't want to be educated; they only want to be entertained. If there is instruction to be given it must be given painlessly, or they stay away. When presented as *The Next of Kin*, the film was a dire flop in Australia, whereas here, sold purely and simply as a commercial entertainment, it has been a tremendous success, and at the same time the propaganda has found its mark. Even if we had presented it as '*Mr. Davis*: Made under the title of *The Next of Kin*' that would have kept people away. We know that, because at the outset we checked with people who unhappily were actually the next-of-kin of soldiers—those who had lost relatives on active service—and asked them how they would react to a film called *The Next of Kin*. They all said they wouldn't want to see it. What we did in changing the title was done entirely with the Government's sanction: they said they were simply interested in getting the maximum number of people to see the film and absorb its message, and I say without fear of contradiction that we have done that."]

FILMS FOR MORALE?

Sir,—In view of the usual high standard of your film section and its excellent attitude to cheap film publicity I presume that your recent article on the reaction of Hollywood to the war effort was intended to be provocative. It certainly provoked me. As far as the "star system" is concerned, I suggest that if this war results in its abolition it will be the healthiest thing that has happened to the Motion Picture Industry. The "star system" supporting, as it does, a mass of moronish propaganda about what actors eat, wear, do, and say, is by far the greatest reason why there is so little intelligent appreciation of films as a cultural, educational, and, yes, entertainment medium. Certainly it keeps attendance figures up, but in such a way that any attempt at education or cultural enlightenment by films is completely clouded.

In any case since when has the American Motion Picture Industry been an instrument for instruction and social works? The few attempts on the part of outsiders to make films on social subjects got little encouragement from the industry. We saw no Paré Lorentz films here. Furthermore how can this "job of Education in Americanism and human relations" be carried out by an organisation dictated to by a sectarian authority such as the Hays Office?

To argue that film actors are necessary to preserve "morale" is no better than arguing that every poet, author, artist, maker of candy, goldfish breeder and racehorse trainer would be exempt from military training also. If this was followed up eventually everybody would be essential and we would have the dear old "business as usual" and "profits for all."

THREE STRIPES (Christchurch).

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1. GROWTH CEASES.
2. LOSS OF WEIGHT AND VIGOUR.
3. LOWERED MUSCULAR TONE.
4. PROCESSES OF DIGESTION DISTURBED.
5. NORMAL CONTRACTIONS OF THE STOMACH IMPAIRED.
6. LOWERED ACID SECRETION IN THE STOMACH.
7. NORMAL MOVEMENTS OF THE INTESTINES IMPAIRED, CAUSING CONSTIPATION.
8. IMPAIRMENT OF NERVOUS CELLS.
9. RESISTANCE TO DISEASE LOWERED.

FUNCTIONS

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2. ESSENTIAL FOR NORMAL CONTRACTIONS OF THE GASTRO-INTESTINAL TRACT.
3. ESSENTIAL FOR THE NORMAL FUNCTIONING OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM.
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