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Film Reviews by G.M.

SPEAKING CANDIDLY

BAMBI

(RKO Radio)



WALT DISNEY is now reported to be concentrating all his energies on producing propaganda and "educational" shorts of various kinds to help America's war effort, so *Bambi* may be the last full-length, pure-entertainment Disney that we shall see for the duration. I am sorry, because although the Disney propaganda-pieces will certainly be much better and more enjoyable than the average, we already have quite enough people to teach and preach at us, and I think that Disney, instead of turning into a super-school-master, could make a better contribution to humanity at this moment simply by doing his bit to keep it gay.

In *Bambi*, however, there is no hint of the new responsibilities that he is taking upon his shoulders. This nature-fable reveals him in his happiest mood: untroubled by the need to expound a doctrine or develop a new medium of expression (as in *Fantasia*), he flings the gates of fantasy wide open, and when we pass through we find ourselves in fairyland again, on the ground where Disney is most at home, and surrounded by the most endearing creatures of his imagination.

For Disney and his artists have always been at their best when drawing animals, and especially young animals—and *Bambi* contains almost nothing else. This is the story of a deer from the day he first opens his eyes by his mother's side to the day when his own fawns are born, and he assumes the dignity of King of the Forest. Man does not enter into the picture, and since Disney has never been really successful in animating the human figure, this is an advantage. Yet, although it is expressed only by the sound of a shot or of a hunting-horn, Man's influence pervades the tale: his is the menace that hangs over all the creatures of the wild, robbing *Bambi* of his mother while he is still young, and destroying the forest sanctuary by fire.

Tutored by Thumper, a young rabbit who is one of Disney's most whimsical creations, *Bambi* learns the meaning of the changing seasons and the ways of the wild; but as he grows toward staghood he suffers the fate of the young of every species—when he sheds his baby ways he sheds much of his beguiling charm. This, in a sense, is unavoidable; yet even the technical ability and imaginative insight of Disney and his staff seem to fail them when once the forest creatures are past the baby stage: the artists are almost as ill at ease with full-grown animals as they are with human beings, and there is a distinct deterioration in the quality of their drawing.

Still, the adult life of *Bambi* does not occupy very much of the picture. Most of the time, he is an endearing little fellow, romping with his equally attractive playmates.

If the film can be said to have anything as serious as a moral, it is that

in all creation only Man is vile—the deliberate taker of life, the callous destroyer of beauty and peace. All the birds and the beasts in *Bambi*'s forest live together on the most neighbourly of terms. My seven-year-old daughter who accompanied me to the film was so much impressed by man's inhumanity that she wept copiously (but briefly), when *Bambi* was orphaned by an unseen huntsman, and I felt that I would never again be permitted to go even rabbit-shooting. But unfortunately for the Disneyan thesis that Nature is not cruel, on returning home we found our front porch occupied by one large, almost-dead rat and our self-satisfied, but still playful cat!

THE AMAZING MRS. HOLLIDAY

(Universal)



THIS new Deanna Durbin film seems to offer an exception to the rule of Nature mentioned above: that as young things grow up they lose some of their charm. You might expect this rule to apply even more to a Hollywood starlet than to a Disney drawing: yet here is Deanna back on the screen after nearly two years' absence, and in the interim she's got married (am I right in saying that she's also had a baby?); and to my mind she's still as unspoiled and as charming as when she was frolicking around as the youngest of the Three Smart Girls. Of course she's changed; there's a touch of responsibility and gravity about her now; but I know of no other actress, or actor either, for that matter, who has so successfully bridged the gap between childhood and maturity. This is a tribute to her own character; it is also a tribute to whoever had charge of her early training and who engrained in her then a sense of what is good taste and what is bad. Fame, fortune, and adulation have, therefore, not been able to turn her head and spoil her manners.

So, although *The Amazing Mrs. Holliday* isn't an important film, it is an exceedingly pleasant one. It's about a young school teacher in China who salvages a collection of war orphans and brings them to America, after having survived torpedoing in the Pacific. In order to keep her flock together under her motherly eye and get them past the immigration authorities, she pretends to be the widow of the wealthy old commodore of the ship that was sunk. Eventually, the old commodore himself, who wasn't really drowned, turns up, but he, too, succumbs as readily as nearly everybody else to the charm and obvious sincerity of the impostor, adopts the orphans and bestows his blessing on the marriage of Deanna and his grandson.

I have heard it complained that Deanna doesn't sing as much as in some of her other films. Perhaps there isn't the quantity, but the quality of the singing is as good as ever; nothing very difficult or spectacular; mostly simple melodies, such as "Mighty Lak a Rose" and "The Old Refrain," delivered simply and melodiously.

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