

# SEARCH FOR A SON

## LITTLE BOY LOST

(Paramount)

**S**ENTIMENTALITY is a rather distasteful weakness, and I like to think I'm no more sentimental than the next man, but when children suffer—well, no film has moved me more than *Germany, Year Zero*, and that's the sort of thing that, as a reviewer, I have to allow for. I didn't expect *Little Boy Lost* to be another *Germany, Year Zero*, and it isn't; but looking at it as dispassionately as I could, and with a somewhat more case-hardened colleague beside me, I found it a moving little film which will assuredly set many people a-swallowing.

The little lost boy of the film, which is based on Marghanita Laski's novel, is the son of an American news broadcaster named Wainwright (Bing Crosby) and a French radio singer named Lisa (Nicole Maurey), who have been separated by war. Lisa is shot as a member of the Resistance, and four years after the liberation of Paris Wainwright is still looking for the child. Perhaps Jean (Christian Fourcade), whom he finds in an orphanage, is his son—but how can he be sure? *Little Boy Lost* isn't a masterpiece; in one or two places it drags a little, and at least one of Bing's songs, during a boat ride at the zoo, is obtrusive. (I think little Jean thought so, too, and showed his discomfort in a remarkably natural way.) But the film has much charm and some suspense, and doesn't founder in the sentimentality one expects with a story of this sort.

The director, George Seaton, has chosen good locations, in Paris and in the village where the orphanage scenes are set—these help to give the film a freshness it wouldn't have if it had been shot in America. And he has got some first-class performances from the cast. Christian Fourcade, with big sad eyes and shaggy hair, is as lost and pathetic and engaging a little boy as you could hope to find in a film; and when he clutches a pair of gloves—his very first present—or produces them from under his pillow like a talisman, he gives much depth to the character, and adds a mute comment on the aftermath of war.

Among other French players, Gerorgette Anys is probably more convincing than anyone else in the film, as an old

### BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "Little Boy Lost."  
FAIR: "Moulin Rouge."

washerwoman who has been helping to smuggle children to the orphanage during the occupation, and Gabrielle Dorziat is a more than adequate Mother Superior. Mr. Crosby, of course, strolls about as relaxed as you like—well, most of the time—showing once again that he can act agreeably, even if you think he can't sing.

## MOULIN ROUGE

(Romulus)

**I**F John Huston's *Moulin Rouge* maintained anything like the quality of its best parts it would be a very good film. It is (alas!) a very disappointing one. The story, from a book by Pierre La Mure, written around the life of the French painter Toulouse-Lautrec, is mainly about the artist's visits to the Moulin Rouge and the paintings they inspired, his addiction to alcohol, and two unhappy love affairs. A flashback shows the childhood accident which stopped the growth of Lautrec's legs so that he became a dwarf.

The opening of the film is fast and stylish—quite dazzling, in fact, in its recreation of a night at the Moulin Rouge in 1890. This is high-class Huston, with imaginative use of the camera that recalls *The Red Badge of Courage*. Lautrec (Jose Ferrer) appears as a sketching hand and a wineglass, and at the end of the night stands, alone for the first time, by his table before going out into the night. His lonely departure and the walk home contrast effectively with the violence of the opening sequences. The flashback to childhood is introduced, and Lautrec meets the street girl (Colette Marchand) of the first love affair.

The whole of this affair is reasonably fluid cinema, but the film seems to fall apart after Lautrec returns to his painting and throws open the windows of his self-chosen gas chamber to the sunlight of Paris. Of course, it couldn't have ended on that false note—not that it aims to be specially truthful as a record of Lautrec's life, as far as I can gather—but the rest of the story is told in a disjointed and at times even tedious fashion; and an ending that looks like making effective use of superimposed shots from the *Moulin Rouge* sequences is ruined by sugary farewells from the exasperating Miss Zsa Zsa Gabor. I can bear to think of her in *Moulin Rouge* only because she sings the haunting little Georges Auric melody by which the film will no doubt be remembered by many who never see it—and even that would have been put across better by someone else.

Jose Ferrer's Lautrec has been criticised for its coldness, but this, after all, wouldn't be surprising as a protective mask in a man afflicted as he was. He has, on the other hand, fits of anger, passion and jealousy which I found completely in character; and there is all the anguish in the world in his strained carriage as he moves through the dark streets, up a stairway or about his room. Colette Marchand's playing of the girl must also be mentioned—it ranges easily all the way from the gutter to moments of sensuous enchantment.



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