

More Power to Minelli

THE BAND WAGON

(M.G.M.)

DELIGHTFUL. I expect many people will say, but still not as good as *On the Town*; and if only I had seen *On the Town* I might agree with them. As it is I can only say I think *The Band Wagon* is the best musical in years. But then, making the obvious comparisons with the more recent films, perhaps I should add that I didn't quite lose my heart to *An American in Paris*, nor find any part of it quite as delightful as Gene Kelly's title solo in *Singin' in the Rain*.

Like *An American in Paris* and many other high-class musicals, *The Band Wagon* is directed by Vincente Minelli. It tells how the talents of a classical ballet dancer, Gabrielle Gerard (Cyd Charisse), and a fading Hollywood dancing star, Tony Hunter (Fred Astaire), are combined in a show written by two of Hunter's friends (Nanette Fabray and Oscar Levant). Every musical has to win a suspension of disbelief in its artificiality, and I must say I surrendered a little unwillingly to Mr. Astaire's dance on a shoeshine's stand—though the setting in a fun fair had just

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "The Band Wagon."
FAIR TO FINE: "Face to Face."

about everything. But once the story moved backstage I was quite won over. Here it introduced Jack Buchanan as Jeffrey Cordova, a sort of actor-producer archetype, who rolls an eye from earth to heaven, scatters superlatives, and all but foams at the mouth.

There will be some, I'm sure, who will regret Minelli's return to the backstage-story formula, and, wanting originality above all, will deplore his use of so many numbers from earlier shows. But the real test surely is the use he makes of the formula, and as for the old numbers—who would have done without, say, "Dancing in the Dark"? And, of course, the film has its new numbers, notably a murder mystery in jazz, a sustained satire on the thriller of sex and violence, in which the script is a telling counterpoint to some brilliant choreography. The satirical note here and elsewhere (in Mr. Buchanan's appearances, for example) coloured the film for me even more agreeably than its excellent Technicolor.

The Band Wagon flows well and moves along at a good pace (though I've

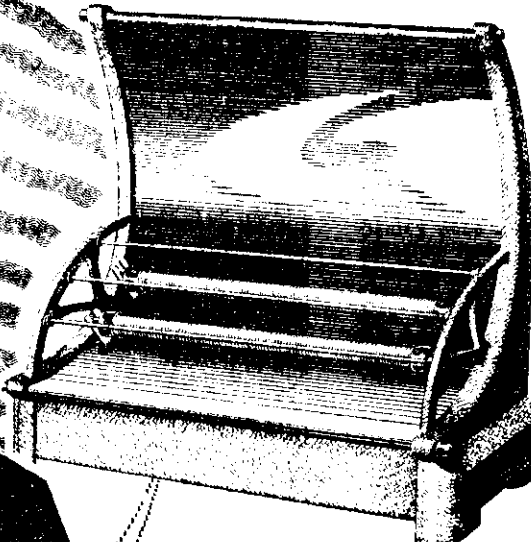
been told it is otherwise). A fine dancer, Miss Charisse constantly delights the senses; and Mr. Astaire not only moves as well as he has ever done, but pleases immensely as an actor and personality. With less scope than he had in *An American in Paris*, Mr. Levant still manages to be amusing, and Miss Fabray and (in particular) Mr. Buchanan are more than adequate additions to the team.

I imagine that *The Band Wagon* was not made with Wide Screen in mind, for no photographer, surely, ever deliberately lost so many heads and feet. I might as well say, too, since it has been on my mind for some time, that this expansive brand of cinema seems to have focus trouble that does not add to the filmgoer's enjoyment.

RIGHT: Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse in "The Band Wagon"



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