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FILM REVIEWS BY JNO.

BOY BEATS GIRL

KISS ME KATE

(M.G.M.)

KISS ME KATE, to be sure, is not the best musical film I've seen—screen adaptations of stage successes generally mean cuts, changes and compromises, and when that happens artistic quality is usually compromised too. But it is a good example of the vigorous American tradition in musical comedy; it has gaiety and brisk tunes, and a quality of cheerful impudence (the plot leans, somewhat nonchalantly, on *The Taming of the Shrew*) that I found greatly refreshing.

Cole Porter, who wrote the music and lyrics, and Samuel and Bella Spewack, who wrote the stage play on which the film is based, undoubtedly deserve the most credit, for it is in music and mood that the show is liveliest and most original. George Sidney, director of the film, has not quite managed to match their quality or their agility. His two principal characters carry on a Katherina-and-Petruchio vendetta offstage and onstage (*Kiss Me Kate* is a show within a show) and the impression grew on me that Mr. Sidney found it difficult to keep up with this scratch-as-scratch-can battle of the sexes. The middle reaches of the film appeared to lack cohesion and in consequence the show as a whole seemed rather too long. And even at 10,000-odd feet a well-directed musical should not leave one with that feeling.

As the two Broadway stars (ex-husband and ex-wife) who have difficulty in keeping their egos in the one basket, Howard Keel and Kathryn Grayson did not prove to be as evenly matched as they have been on other (and more sentimental) occasions. Miss G. is, I'm certain, a sweet girl who wouldn't dream of handing you a fourpenny one in the ordinary course of business, and I felt sure, even when she sang "I Hate Men," that she would gladly have relinquished the part if there had been someone else handy to pass it on to—someone with the stridency of attack of, say, Ethel Merman. Howard Keel, on the other hand, plays his woman-baiting role with bravura and gusto, sings better than I have heard him sing before, and in doublet-and-hose and an Elizabethan whisker looks an imposing figure of a man.

Of the supporting players, Ann Miller has the most exacting assignment. As one might expect, her dancing is pleasant to watch, though I felt that the choreography did not exact her best from her. Unlike Mr. Keel she appeared to be more at home in a few handfuls of pink sequins than in the costume of old Padua—though, on reflection, that isn't perhaps so odd after all. Two other characters deserve mention: Keenan Wynn and James Whitmore. As a couple of Runyonesque gangsters who become unwittingly mixed up in the stage-show, they are responsible for the lower stratum of the comedy. They seemed to enjoy being low comedians and (though it's probably a damaging admission) I enjoyed them, too.

HOUSE OF LOST WOMEN

(*Romulus-20th Century Fox*)

LIKE *No Room at the Inn*, which caused a mild furore when it was shown here in 1950, *House of Lost*

N.Z. LISTENER, JUNE 11, 1954.