

Is There an Aspirin in the House?

NOT AS A STRANGER

(Stanley Kramer Pictures Corp.)

EVER since I suffered a partial blackout at a screening of *Men in White* in a suburban picturedrome on Whit Monday, '36 (it was that confounded wheezing football bladder that did it), I have tried to steer clear of Hollywood's more clinical melodramas and to avoid acquaintance with those people who will tell one all about their operations.

But it's not so easy to ignore Stanley Kramer as it was to avoid young Dr. Kildare or old Dr. Barrymore. Regard me, then, coked to the gills on drama-mine, toeing the line of duty at the Wellington premiere of *Not as a Stranger* in conditions which I could not but regard as inauspicious. It was one of those Wellington evenings—too wet to go out without a coat and too warm to wear one; the theatre was packed, humidity was high, ice-cream cones were disintegrating on every hand, and the air was full of the pervasive odour of vanilla. Feeling queasy? So was I.

I felt a little more so (this, you will gather, is a highly personalised account of the seance) when the Censor's Cer-

ificate revealed that the line of duty was going to stretch out for 12,500 feet. Nor had we to wait long for Mr. Kramer to show his hand. The film opens with a deceptively quiet shot of a long hospital corridor; orderlies appear wheeling a sheeted trolley. It approaches, comes to rest. Broderick Crawford moves into the shot (white-smocked, skull-capped): "Gentlemen . . . this is a corpse."

A hackneyed opening? I suppose it is, but to be hit below the belt with a cliché doesn't make it any more comfortable. If you remain sufficiently detached to recall the Censor's Certificate, you will understand why it was a "Special A—Unsuitable for Children." Adults whose imaginations are stronger than their stomachs will doubtless be able to decide for themselves whether it is suitable for them. For Mr. Kramer doesn't spare the realism. Those anaesthetometer bladders puff and blow in every other sequence. X-rays click on and off to reveal safety-pins in the bronchi of adventurous infants, hypodermics squirt, fresher students keel over and the dialogue is enlivened by such evocative lines as "We will make a vertical midline incision. . . ." The *pièce de résistance* is, I suppose, an emergency cardiac operation with a big close-up of the human heart seen through what looks like a

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "New Faces."

FAIR: "Not as a Stranger."

OVERCAST: "An Alligator Named Daisy."

foot-square hole cut in the rib-cage—a shot which affected me as strongly as the bulging screen and throbbing pulse in the first act of Olivier's screen *Hamlet*, though scarcely to such good purpose.

As Dr. Broderick Crawford says in his opening remarks, "For some of you this will be unpleasant." But at least I can claim that I survived. There were moments when I found it more comfortable to remove my thoughts elsewhere, but I didn't once slide under the seat in something like two and a half hours. And what did I get for my pains? A great quantity of technically excellent, and frequently dramatic movie-photography by Frank Planer—with an occasional severe spiritual buffeting in the big close-ups; good acting by such supporting players as Crawford, Olivia de Havilland, Frank Sinatra, and the veteran Charles Bickford; and an emotional vacuum in the area occupied by Robert Mitchum, the nominal star. Mitchum is a big man, but to me he registers little more than bulk. Because of this central weakness—and a brief passage of ludicrous symbolism that turns one of the more melodramatic interludes into farce—the film itself comes close to meriting the same criticism. It is saved by the minor players, by the photography, and, I suppose, by the rough ruthlessness of Mr. Kramer. But I would have liked it better at half the length.

NEW FACES

(Edward L. Alperson-CinemaScope)

IN some ways one of the oddest films I have seen for months, *New Faces* is, in others, one of the most stimulating and entertaining. But not as a genuine film. Neither Mr. Alperson, nor his director Harry Horner seems to know what to do with CinemaScope, and they have only the vaguest idea of film technique. Their show, in fact, is something to make the purist shudder and the technician fume—but it gets across nonetheless. It is, in short, a more or less literal camera record of a Broadway variety performance—fast, witty, tuneful; and at times uproariously funny. Most of it, I think, would be enjoyed by the general film-going public out for a night's fun, but there's a fair amount of caviare in the mixture—sophisticated comedy and sly allusive satire that will be appreciated most by those who maintain a fairly steady acquaintance with the livelier American magazines, such as the *New Yorker*. The best compliment I

can pay *New Faces* is to affirm that it makes some of the old faces look pretty haggard by comparison. The most serious criticism—beyond that already made of the direction—is that some of the dialogue seemed too fast for ears attuned to a South Pacific tempo. Or was it simply that my own ageing ear-drums, scorched by some of Miss Eartha Kitt's numbers, were momentarily desensitized? That could be—there's no doubt that so far as sheer impact goes Eartha is the hit of the show. She sings several numbers ("C'est si bon," of course, to open up with), and with no help at all from the director contrives to give CinemaScope something of the quality of 3-D. But she's not the only attraction. There are two admirable comics in Ronny Graham and Alice Ghostley, and a crew-cut pocket-size juvenile lead named Robert Clary who sounds like a sophisticated Norman Wisdom (if you can assimilate such an association of disparate ideas). With another dozen assorted singers and stooges they keep the pace cracking so merrily that in 9000 feet of film there's literally not a dull moment, little Harry Horner notwithstanding. And the Eastman Colour is easy on the eyes, too.

AN ALLIGATOR NAMED DAISY

(Rank-Raymond Stross)

NEITHER VistaVision, nor Technicolor, nor the strenuous efforts of Stanley Holloway, James Robertson Justice, Donald Sinden, et al, can make anything more than thin fun out of this piece of low-grade gallimaufry. There are two isolated glimpses of real comedy in the whole laboured show—one gives us a brief look at Wilfred Lawson (who saddles Donald Sinden with a tame alligator), the other shows us Stanley Holloway, as a retired general complete with shooting-stick, lost in the endless corridors of a millionaire's country home. For the rest—throw 'em to the crocodiles, I say.



EARTHA KITT
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