

Mainly Light and Bright

THE COURT JESTER

Paramount-Dena-VistaVision

BECAUSE we don't all laugh at the same things, comedy films are amongst the hardest to review, but I shall be surprised if *The Court Jester* is not pretty generally enjoyed. Personally, I found it more even than *Knock on Wood*. This new Danny Kaye film is a tale of the Middle Ages, about a wicked usurper who has made his way to the throne by killing everyone he can lay hands on who has any real claim to it. His followers are harassed by a band of outlaws who, he presently discovers, have the real prince with them.



DANNY KAYE

The pimpernel is purple

in the forest. You soon realise that this is a rather tongue-in-cheek affair when you see that the usurper is Cecil Parker and that the symbol which brings the baby prince's loyal subjects to their knees is the royal birthmark, a purple pimpernel, on the baby's buttocks; and as Hubert Hawkins, an entertainer with the outlaw band, Danny Kaye has struck the right note with a wonderfully amusing impersonation of an old man even before the plot fairly gets moving when he enters the castle disguised as a jester from the Italian court.

Certainly one of the most gentle and likeable men in films, Mr. Kaye has a story here that gives him generous opportunities, and plotting, love-making, duelling, sword-fighting, now bewildered, now dashing (as he falls under a witch's spell), he keeps the fun going steadily and at a satisfying pace. The action delightfully parodies the sort of film we have all seen, yet it never goes so far that we lose interest in the plot. Actually it's hard not to take seriously at times the sinister forces around the usurper when one of his counsellors is Basil Rathbone. The women in the cast include Glynis Johns, who plays an attractive heroine very capably, and Angela Lansbury, quite adequate as the usurper's daughter. *The Court Jester*, which Norman Panama and Melvin Frank scripted and directed, includes some agreeable songs by Sylvia Fine, and Sammy Cahn, and these are, of course, well put across by Mr. Kaye.

N.Z. LISTENER, MAY 25, 1956.

BAROMETER

FINE: "The Court Jester."
FAIR: "Man of the Moment."
FAIR: "Deep in My Heart."

MAN OF THE MOMENT

(Rank-Group Films)

FOR one reason and another, I saw neither of the earlier Norman Wisdom comedies, but having heard so much about them I found it hard to approach *Man of the Moment* with an open mind. I gather it may be better than the others, and I must say I found it agreeably surprising. I was especially pleased to discover only one scene that really invited us to feel sorry for Mr. Wisdom. It's true he's a simple soul, a little man, who gets by more or less by accident—but he does get by and keeps bouncing. As a person and a character I find him quite engaging—one of those likeable fellows who are most amusing when they're most able to be themselves. The weakest parts of this film are slightly tedious farce, no doubt meant to force the pace, which seems to me largely to ignore his special talent.

The story concerns an argument about a Pacific island which a number of countries, including Britain, would like to use as a base. Mr. Wisdom, a filing clerk, finds himself whisked off to Geneva, and eventually standing in as a delegate to maintain the strength of Britain's voice. Of course, there are intrigue, dirty work, pretty girls, and so on, and because he wrote a simple man's simple letter to the island queen Mr. Wisdom suddenly finds himself invited to bargain from a Position of Strength. Inia Te Wiata, by the way, has a smallish part as a Pacific island delegate. John Paddy Carstairs directed.

DEEP IN MY HEART

(M.G.M.)

DEEP IN MY HEART, directed by Stanley Donen, is largely an exception to the comic note this week, for the songs of Sigmund Romberg, whose life story the film tells, were never meant to be treated as a joke. I'm sure Mr. Romberg, at any rate, took their sentiment pretty seriously, and his speech at the end of the film had me just a little uncomfortable. All the same, I wouldn't have missed this 11,000-footer for anything, for right in the middle was the most succulent comic plum of the week: a one-man run-through of one of his own shows by Mr. Romberg (played by Jose Ferrer), which had me helpless. Actually, as musical biographies go, this is quite a good one which doesn't seem as long as it is—a fair enough test. Mr. Ferrer, who never does a shoddy job, makes a credible and generally likeable composer, supported principally by Helen Traubel as his friend Anna Mueller, Merle Oberon (how nice to see her again) as Dorothy Donnelly, who wrote some of his shows, and Doe Avedon as the girl he married. The incidents from his private life, especially the love story, are worth telling and well told; and the best of the numbers from his shows, presented by an impressive collection of guest stars, are exciting to watch and listen to. To select two from the many: personally I never tire of Cyd Charisse and Ann Miller, whose dance numbers are outstanding.

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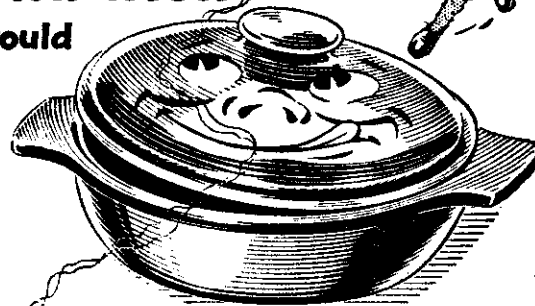
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