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Film Reviews, by F.A.J.

BACK ON THE TOWN

IT'S ALWAYS FAIR WEATHER

(M.G.M.-CinemaScope)

UNMOVED by the new look the American musical took on 10 or 15 years ago, many keen filmgoers still react to any enthusiasm for it with a let-me-hold-you-between-thumb-and-forefinger-while-I-look-at-you-disdainfully sort of attitude. Personally, I think a good musical can be the best of screen entertainment, especially if it's a little satirical, and *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* and others notwithstanding, I prefer also the city setting with its rather agreeable undertone of disenchantment. *It's Always Fair Weather* displays most of these qualities on the way to its inevitable end.

Like *On the Town*, it begins with three servicemen hitting New York—this time at the end of the war. Ted (Gene Kelly), Doug (Dan Dailey) and Angie (Michael Kidd) pub crawl and part, promising to meet again in 10 years. This opening has the right note: the setting has atmosphere and the dancing vigour. At the reunion the three find they haven't much to say to one another, but a meeting with Jackie Leighton (Cyd Charisse), who is as bitter about men as Ted is about women, involves them in a hectic evening which in one way or another changes all of them.

In a musical so much depends on the treatment that this sketchy outline says little; but for a start Mr. Kelly is his usual endearing self—his meeting with Miss Charisse and his first parting is full of charm, and a roller skate ballet in the street is among the best of the dance numbers. Mr. Dailey also has one excellent solo, a drunken romp with some of his bosses in the advertising world, whose horrible jargon he parodies; and Mr. Kidd, so far known only as a choreographer (*Seven Brides*), makes a big impression as a most engaging actor and dancer. In the romantic lead Miss Charisse, unhappily, steps out only once in a short but original number in a boxers' gymnasium, and, in fact, rather more dancing is done by another newcomer, Dolores Gray, the star of a big scene which delightfully satirises commercial television and includes the best song of the show. "Thanks a Lot, But No Thanks." The directors, Mr. Kelly and Stanley Donen (who also arranged the dances), give this the full treatment, and with an amusing ballet Miss Gray puts it across well.

The film's weakness, I think, is that it leans a little heavily on its story—good as it is when about its real business, its long passages of more or less straight narrative don't always reflect the glow of the music and dancing. (It could be, of course, that these don't glow quite brightly enough.) All the same, I think most people will find that as such films go *It's Always Fair Weather* is a pretty superior production. It has, by the way, a special attraction for the film enthusiast in its use of the split screen and, more interestingly, a screen of variable size—both as devices to isolate a character.

THE PASSING STRANGER

(Harlequin)

DIANE CILENTO is the draw card in *The Passing Stranger*, a rather attractive minor British drama. As Jill, who runs a small roadside eating house

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "It's Always Fair Weather."
FAIR: "The Passing Stranger."
OVERCAST: "Female on the Beach."

with her sister, Miss Cilento finds herself sheltering, and presently in love with, an American Army deserter named Chick (Lee Patterson), who is in trouble with the British police because he has got involved with gun-runners. Also in the picture is a truck-driver (Duncan Lamont) who wants to marry Jill himself. The climax follows Chick's decision to join the gang in one last job to earn the money to flee the country with Jill; and, cut to a smart pace, the last part of the film has plenty of tension. Bits of the story are not completely credible, but the players do well with the material they're given, and with adequate direction by John Arnold and some fine camerawork by Walter Lassally, *The Passing Stranger*, once well away, never fails to hold the interest. The music also, by Ken Sykora, is just right, and underlines a certain agreeable lyric quality in parts of the film.

FEMALE ON THE BEACH

(Universal-International)

IF I could for a moment believe in the insensitive oaf (Jeff Chandler) who's the hero of *Female on the Beach*, I'd feel sorry for him. Not only is he murderously attacked by his mother before she commits suicide; he also has to fall in love with Joan Crawford's latest incarnation, a rich widow. The moment he sees her Jeff starts hanging around, throwing passes like a scrum-half until Joan asks him whether he "goes with the house, like the plumbing." This, as any Third former knows, means she's fatally fascinated, and ignoring a suspicion that Jeff murdered the last woman of wealth in the neighbourhood, she quietly goes to her doom like the beautiful, solitude-loving, credulous, can't-help-herself creature she is. To her doom? But hadn't you tumbled to that bad blonde? My guess about this film is that someone vitally concerned with the story had a session in Joan's private bar before she moved in for her highball marathon. The fumes gave me the hiccups in the back stalls. Gimme a hand with the empties, will ya?



MICHAEL KIDD
A big impression

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 3, 1956.