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FILM REVIEWS, BY F.A.J.

When East Meets West

THE KING AND I

(20th Century-Fox)

G Cert.

MORE than two hours of *The King and I* comes close to fulfilling the claim of its Wellington exhibitor that the wonders of CinemaScope 55 are never-ending, so it's all the more pleasant to be able to say that this spectacular musical is continuously interesting and entertaining. Even more surprising in a show so big and splendid, it has a great deal of charm, to which the King's numerous delightful children notably contribute. *The King and I*, which comes to the screen from Margaret Landon's novel, *Anna and the King of Siam*, by way of a Rodgers and Hammerstein stage musical, is set nearly 100 years ago at the Siamese court, which a young English widow has just joined as a teacher of English. Walter Lang, who directed it, has made something of his opportunities to provide rich spectacle and colour, but his real concern is with the relations between Anna and the King—with the effect, that is, of a beautiful, strong-willed emancipated but good-humoured Englishwoman on a strong-willed but also good-humoured Oriental despot. In the end the conflict between the two worlds is so great that in a more than merely romantic sense it breaks the King's heart.

Deborah Kerr gives a fine performance as Anna, but the acting triumph of the film is Yul Brynner's King. Especially attractive is his humour—his delight, for instance, at getting his own way when he insists that, since he is King, Anna's head must never be higher than his; and there is high drama also, in the climactic scene between these two when their dance is interrupted so that he can cruelly punish one of his wives caught running away. The dialogue, no doubt from the original play, is often witty ("Love," says the polygamous King, "is a silly complication of a pleasant simplicity"), and the musical numbers generally more tuneful and the lyrics better than in *Carousel*. *The King and I* has also a secondary love story; and it presents as an incidental pleasure



YUL BRYNNER

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "The King and I."
FAIR TO FINE: "The Sinner."
FAIR: "Black Tuesday."

an Oriental version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that's quite breathtaking in its beauty and invention.

THE SINNER

(Cellini Films) R: 16 years and over.

THE SINNER is an extraordinarily interesting and oddly haunting film. One of the very few post-war German productions we've seen, it was made by a pre-war German director, Willi Forst, from an idea of his own; Gerhard Menzel wrote the script. Like many pre-war German films it is preoccupied with sin, disease and death, as a background to a love story. Its stars, Hildegard Neff (seen here in British and American films) and Gustav Froelich, the players of great talent, though in this piece Fraulein Neff overacts at times.

Herr Froelich is Alexander, an artist who is going blind, and Fraulein Neff is Marina, his wife. She picked him up, literally from the gutter, outside a night club, took him home and for the first time found herself in love. The daughter of a good-time mother and a father of the old school, she had been seduced at 14 by a cousin. Since then she had had many wealthy lovers, and she is still willing to do so occasionally if she needs money badly to help the man she loves. All this is told in a matter-of-fact way and one or two scenes are fairly sensational—but not, I think, gratuitously so.

Beginning and ending at almost the same point of time, *The Sinner* is in effect largely an elaborate flashback which moves backwards and forwards freely within the girl's past as her voice on the soundtrack recalls it. Since we often do remember in that erratic way, this device is really very effective; and though there's not very much dialogue, a fairly strong visual narrative style (the photography at its best is very good) underlined by the voice of Marina—and it's all in English—make the story quite as easy to follow as any told in more conventional terms.

BLACK TUESDAY

(Leonard Goldstein-United Artists)

R: 16 years and over.

THE story of a jail-break by a big-time killer (Edward G. Robinson), a bank robber (Peter Graves)—both awaiting electrocution—and several others, *Black Tuesday* is a well-made piece—stark, fast and suspenseful. The early scenes leading up to the escape are especially good: the prisoners wait behind their bars, the executioner tests the electric chair, the witnesses file into the execution chamber; and there's a very dramatic sequence later when the bank robber, who has been wounded in the escape, goes to a safe deposit box in the heart of the city to pick up the haul from his big job. Eventually the escapees, the killer's girl friend (Jean Parker) and a number of hostages (a warder's kidnapped daughter, a doctor, a priest, a reporter, a warder) are surrounded in a warehouse, and there's a bloody battle which left me a little depressed. Mr. Robinson is impressive in a familiar part in this film, which Hugo Fregonese directed from a script by Sydney Boehm.

N.Z. LISTENER, NOVEMBER 9, 1956.