

WAYS OF ESCAPE

HIGH SOCIETY

(M.G.M.-Vistavision)

G Cert.

FEELING miserable, depressed, out of sorts? Slightly cosseted by the credit-squeeze? Upset by the disequilibrium of overseas payments, the one-sidedness of hire-purchase agreements? If you're looking for a way of escape (strictly temporary, of course), then *High Society* has a funk-hole tailored to fit you and your particular neurosis.

Primarily, of course, it's an escape from suburbia to the Elysian Fields of the supertaxed, where everyone is gay and almost everyone is witty, and there are no dishes to wash. Mum will love it. But she needn't have it all on her own. There's Grace Kelly for the girls (fashions and all that); for the middle-aged there's Bing Crosby, for the slightly under middle-aged Frank Sinatra and Celeste Holm; the music and lyrics of Cole Porter for the sophisticates, and for all and sundry old Louis Armstrong, his trumpet and his cosy virtuosi.

High Society is the kind of show I'd be pleased to underwrite, were I an underwriter, and tempted to overwrite as a common or garden cash-customer. I must confess to feeling slightly apathetic about Miss Kelly, now safely entrenched behind the *Almanach de Gotha*, but I enjoy the allusive New Yorkerish quality of Cole Porter's lyrics. I like Crosby, I've acquired a taste for Sinatra and Satchmo, and I just adore Celeste Holm. Ah, yes, I know the patter of tiny crows' feet is beginning to leave its mark around those big blue eyes, and the radius of some of the curves appears to have decreased sharply over the years, but she has a gaiety that few of the younger fry can match and a capacity for comedy they might well envy. And she is, every comfortably upholstered inch of her, a professional. She can convey by a twitch of the eyebrow or a tilt of the shoulder more than some run-of-the-mill screenplayers could achieve with benefit of close-up, cross-cutting and direction.

If you enjoyed her performance in *The Tender Trap*, then you'll enjoy her here, as the ace photographer of *Spy* magazine who (with Frank Sinatra as feature writer) descends on the gilded pleasure-domes of Newport to record a society wedding. The wedding doesn't go altogether according to plan—in part because an ex-husband (Bing Crosby) is staging a jazz festival in the adjoining palazzo—but that doesn't prevent a jolly time being had by almost all. *High Society* (director, Charles Walters) is, in fact, a smooth and tuneful show, wittier and more sophisticated than most musicals (and none the worse for that, either).

TOUCH AND GO

(Rank-Ealing)

G Cert.

IF *High Society* is gay and sophisticated, *Touch and Go* (directed by Michael Truman) is by contrast rather down to earth and domesticated. I don't mean to suggest that it is stodgy—Ealing comedies rarely are—but it's middle class, the humour more conventional

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "High Society."
FAIR: "Touch and Go."
DULL: "The Last Hunt."

(though warmer because we are closer to it), the wit less effervescent. And while it has a General Certificate (and a beautiful black cat in the cast of characters), it is really more a comedy for parents than for the family as a whole. As Jack Hawkins and Margaret Johnston by turn win an argument or in some more unobtrusive fashion get their own way, wives will nudge husbands and husbands dig wives in the ribs. The sparring is (Ealingwise) all thoroughly pleasant and though it is perhaps the oldest of all comedy staples a certain topicality is added by presenting the Fletcher family as on the point of emigrating to Australia. This allows for certain variations in the formula. What, for example, is the Fletchers' teenaged daughter to do about the young man she finds she has fallen in love with just twelve hours before they are due to embark at Tilbury? And what is to be done about Heathcliff the cat, who gets lost at the psychological moment?

This isn't the best of Ealing comedy, but it's wholesome and pleasant enough to pass muster. It is, at any rate, one more proof of Hawkins's versatility. I never thought to see him play second fiddle to a cat, but then I've never struck a cat as upstage as Heathcliff.

THE LAST HUNT

(M.G.M.-CinemaScope)

A Cert.

I FIND it almost impossible to say a good word about this production. It's the story of a killer (Robert Taylor) whose chief pleasure in life is the slaughter of buffaloes, and such unfortunate Indians as happen to come within range of his Winchester; and from the amount of footage devoted to the examination of his blood-lust and its consequences I can't imagine this film—or the 7000-odd feet of it that I managed to sit out—delighting any but those similarly infected. One thing I noted: Killer Charlie, in a fumbling attempt to define his own peculiar moment of truth, found more in common between sex and slaughter than Hollywood has hitherto cared to admit.



JACK HAWKINS
Second fiddle to a cat

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