

NAME YOUR POISSON!

THE PASSIONATE STRANGER
(Beaconsfield-Lion-International) A Cert.

ONE man's meat, as a witty French savant once observed, is another man's poisson and no dish, I have myself discovered, can induce sharper or more immediate disagreement than comedy. If (like me) you are diverted by *The Passionate Stranger*, the odds are that *Sailor Beware* (see below) in which the humour is more blatant and basic will leave you limp with indifference. Or just limp.

Not that I can claim to have enjoyed *The Passionate Stranger* unreservedly—I'll come to the qualifications in a moment—but I was undeniably diverted by it, and the fact that I find myself remembering the best of it rather than the second-best is a circumstance not without significance. And one of the best things about this screenplay—by Muriel and Sydney Box (immovably fixed in my mind by Muir and Norden as Sidney Carton's big brother)—is that it is original. An original screenplay, of course, is not good *per se*, but all good screenplays must have a significant measure of originality (film being a medium in its own right), and in comedy originality—being harder to come by—is a lot more important than in other dramatic forms.

The passionate stranger of the title is a young Italian (Carlo Justini), who is engaged as chauffeur by a scientist, Ralph Richardson, and his novelist wife, Margaret Leighton. Miss L., who churns out light romances for a London publisher, and for whom all's grist that comes to the mill, dashes off a torrid opus about the frustrated wife of a scientist who falls madly in love with her chauffeur—and, as luck will have it, young Carlo reads the manuscript and jumps to all sorts of superheated conclusions. An engaging device employed by Muriel Box (who directed) is to inject this "inside story" into the film as a long full-colour passage enclosed by black-and-white sequences fore and aft. This treatment, by giving visual reinforcement to the tuppence-coloured sentiments of the novelette, serves to sharpen the satirical element in the comedy and to emphasise the quality of incongruity which underlines almost all humour.

Where Muriel Box has erred—and erred substantially—is in making the



SIR RALPH RICHARDSON
Penny-plain and tuppence coloured

BAROMETER

FAIR: "The Passionate Stranger."
OVERCAST: "Sailor Beware."
OVERCAST: "The Siege."

middle colour section much too long, and in allowing her story to encroach on emotional territory where comedy cannot in good taste be maintained. Cuckoldry is an old subject for humour, but to involve it with impotence—as she comes close to doing—isn't funny. The final sequence in black-and-white—the deflation of the romantic Carlo—does much to neutralise the offensive moments and the film ends warmly and pleasantly, but it's a fair comment, I think, that Muriel should have done better. Of course it's true, as Chesterton said, that anything worth doing is worth doing badly, but better judgment might have closed the gap between promise and performance.

SAILOR BEWARE

(Romulus-Remus)

G Cert.

TO enjoy this English comedy (I hesitate to call it British) it is necessary to nourish an enthusiasm for the comic cliché, to share with *Punch* the notion that farce and the lower classes are inseparable, and that there is something essentially hilarious about mothers-in-law and the business of getting married. It is also helpful to be tone-deaf, since Peggy Mount, whose particular vehicle this is, relies for her comic impact on a voice like a well-tempered klaxon. And there are apparently thousands of filmgoers who meet those specifications. That I am not one of them is, I suppose, only my loss. Indeed, I do believe that. He who can no longer laugh when a comedian sits on his hat (the comedian's hat, I mean) has lost something which the years will not replace. I lost it long ago, and though I sat out *Sailor Beware* to the last offstage decibel from the decibellicose Mrs Hornett, it was strictly in the line of duty, not pleasure. And the line of duty has rarely seemed so like a front line under heavy and continuous bombardment.

THE SIEGE

(Cifesa-Lippert)

Y Cert.

THE siege which this short (6000 ft.) Spanish historical movie celebrates is the siege laid to Saragossa in 1808 by the invading French armies. During it, the citizens—led by Don José de Palafox and Maria Agustina, "The Maid of Saragossa"—defended themselves with fanatical intensity; and died in thousands. *The Siege*, therefore, is a strongly patriotic film, but patriotism is—as ever—not enough. It is not enough, at this distance anyway, to counterpoise an American-language dubbing of almost moronic banality; nor could I resist a chuckle at the frequent references, early on, to "The Documents" which someone was waiting for anxiously on the other side of the French lines. Minnie and Henry have much to answer for. It is difficult to understand, too, how (unless stock material was heavily drawn upon) a production so sparsely mounted in its studio sequences could muster such impressively massed cavalry charges. Photographically—and every other way—these set pieces, and one or two brief shots obviously based on Goya's "Disasters of War," are the best of a film which has mainly a curiosity value for the local filmgoer. The director was Juan de Orduna.

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