

It's What You Do With What You've Got

SO DEAR TO MY HEART

(Disney-RKO Radio)

WHAT Mr. Disney has done with what he's got (to borrow words from one of the folksy little songs in his latest production) is a question which may, perhaps, divide his admirers. Those who are exclusively interested in Disney the animator and the colourist may feel that seeing *So Dear to My Heart* is like assisting at the burial of a talent, for the cartoon content of the film is insignificant and could, I think, have been dispensed with entirely—with some benefit to the human story. But it should not be inferred that the film is a negligible effort. No child, I feel sure, could fail to enjoy it, and certainly no sensible adult need distrust the soft impact of its gentle sentimentality.

As with most of the sentimental stories which undergo a Hollywood metamorphosis, the plot is rubbed smooth with use and positively coruscates with clichés—but those who are parents will know that that is how children like their stories; and it is no doubt Disney's skilful touch that makes the sentiment and the nostalgic overtones acceptable to the older and more disillusioned.

In *So Dear to My Heart* Disney has, however, two admirable subjects for the exercise of his skill as an entertainer—Bobby Driscoll (the child star of *The Window*), and a mean-hearted black lamb to whom he is devoted. The story can almost be guessed from that alone: the youngster saves the lamb from an early passage to the meatworks and it grows up to be the plague of the neighbourhood. Nobody loves it but the boy, and he nurses an ambition to exhibit it at the County Fair. Of course, that costs money, and Bobby has none (he's an orphan, and Granny, who ain't no traipsin' woman, don't hold with County Fairs and such). But Bobby finds a wild bees' hive and sells the honey for twenty dollars, Granny (Beulah Bondi) relents, they go to the fair, the black lamb wins a special award, and the film ends in a mist of tear-dimmed Technicolor.

Put as briefly as, that it all sounds pretty hackneyed, but the merit of Disney's performance is that somehow or other he escapes cheapness. Undoubtedly he is immensely helped by the natural charm and photogenic quality of Bobby Driscoll and his lamb, and by some pleasant singing from Burl Ives ("Lavender's Blue" in particular), but, reverting to the theme-song, what he has done with what he's got does do him credit.

Of course, all that leaves unanswered the larger question, what is Disney the cartoonist doing with what he's got? *So Dear to My Heart*, with its complete divorce of the animated and "live" sequences does look like a retreat, or an admission of the animator's limitations, but it is as well to bear in mind the high cost of full-length cartoons—and the need for Disney (who is now very

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "So Dear to My Heart."
FAIR: "The Great Lover."
OVERCAST: "Tulsa."

big business) to finance them by excursions into other fields. That he is occasionally tempted into by-paths is no indication that he has lost his way.

THE GREAT LOVER

(Paramount)

HOPE and Crosby jointly have, I think, spoiled me for Hope and Crosby severally. Maybe it's the sign of a debauched taste, this simultaneous craving for the dry and the sweet, but these days when I see the one I look for the other, and if he is not in evidence my interest flags a little. And yet I don't think that this is altogether an unreasonable prejudice. The two are each funny in themselves, but they are also undoubtedly the cause of wit in one another and their solo performances somehow lack the sparkle and spontaneity of their joint efforts, where a good deal of the humour has at least the appearance of being off the cuff.

The Great Lover is one of Hope's solo excursions, and though it is by no means a forlorn Hope I can call to mind a number of occasions when I have been much more helpless with laughter. With Hope as the simple chaperone of a troop of Boy Foresters (a B.F. is truthful, brave and clean, and is never seen in the arms of any woman but his mother), the film opens with vast possibilities for good, clean fun, but somehow or other these are only partially realised. The stock situations get more in Hope's way than do the Boy Foresters (as usual, he has to make frantic efforts to avoid seduction), many of his wisecracks cast their shadows before, and there even seem to be fewer jokes than usual. I noticed, too, that once again he makes much play with a slow double-take, or delayed reaction—a form of humour which was thrashed to death years ago by Edward Everett Horton. But where there is Hope let charity abide also—he's still funnier than most.

TULSA

(Eagle-Lion)

ACCORDING to one authority, the Allies in World War I floated to victory on a wave of oil. *Tulsa* floats in the opposite direction. Susan Hayward, as the wildcatting daughter of a defunct cattle breeder, keeps three beaux on a string, gambles on gushers (she also dunks herself ceremoniously in them), and wins millions of dollars. In the end she loses most of them in a spectacular oil-field fire which, one gathers, is the most impressive blaze since London got into the red in 1666. In spite of Walter Wanger's pyrotechnics, however, it seemed to me that the film signally failed to prove its case—that pedigree Herefords and oil-derricks can live in peace together,

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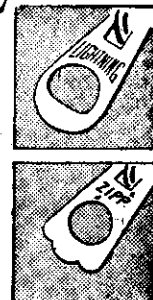


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