

Anybody Here Not Seen Kelly?

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS

(M.G.M.)

IT was a good Easter, was it not? Yes, it was—at least, in Wellington. You know what almost always happens when school's out, even for a long weekend: a cold front rolls up from the south, the neon-light district seems to revert temporarily to gaslight, Laurel and Hardy come galumphing back, and Tarzan swings on every other hoarding. But this Easter none of these things happened. We had, instead, the gayest American musical film I have seen and, on top of that, the funniest Ealing comedy to greet these old eyes (now occupationally bloodshot) since *Passport to Pimlico*. The weather, too, they say, was fine.

An American in Paris, built around the music of George Gershwin, produced by Arthur Freed, directed by Vincente Minnelli, and generally activated by Gene Kelly (he did the choreography, drilled the dancers, imported Leslie Caron for the feminine lead, and himself took the title role) gained for M.G.M. eight of the 1951 Academy Awards. The film has therefore been—as you might say—consecrated far above my poor power to add or detract, even if I wanted to.

And, of course, perversely and on second thoughts, I do want to. I'd like to subtract the award for the best screen play. The story is that antique Hollywood stereotype Boy-meets-girl-boy-loses-girl-boy-finds-girl in its simplest form. If it wasn't told with grace, charm, tenderness, good humour, zest, gaiety, sparkle, colour . . . well, if it wasn't, you wouldn't give it another thought. In place of the story award, I should like to have seen the studio commended for producing a film about an American abroad without once mentioning the American way of life, or suggesting that he represented the last stronghold of democracy in a twilight Europe.

For Gene Kelly's work I have nothing but admiration. His energy is prodigious without being tiresomely exuberant. As a choreographer he is a rung or two

BAROMETER

FINE: "An American in Paris."
FINE: "The Lavender Hill Mob."

below Helpman, if we compare *An American in Paris* with *The Red Shoes*. but he is nevertheless a craftsman and an artist, and the extent of his contribution to the success of this production is, I suspect, greater than might be deduced from the credits. As a talent-scout alone, his discovery of Leslie Caron would have been a good deed in any day. I thought her an excellent dancer, and in looks a refreshing contrast to Hollywood's conventional ideas of pulchritude.

But I think the most telling comment I can make on *An American in Paris* is that it is over 10,000 feet long—and I could have wished it longer. That I felt no eyestrain was, I am sure, due to the skilful handling of the colour, and Oscar Levant's clowning and playing contributed to my enjoyment. But my interest was on the whole held by one player. If anybody here hasn't seen Kelly, don't put it off any longer.

THE LAVENDER HILL MOB

(Rank-Ealing)

THE LAVENDER HILL MOB

(directed by Charles Crichton) is a diversion altogether different in kind from *An American in Paris*—but equally entertaining. It has not the Gershwin show's youthful candour and innocence (unless you can stretch that to include the "innocent passion for loot" which, according to one authority, is in certain circumstances a ruling British characteristic), but it benefits inestimably from the conjunction of two outstanding comic characters. The visible member of the duo is, of course, the protean Mr. Guinness; the other is the script-writer T. E. B. Clarke. Both are essentially humorists—and in my view the worth of a good humorist is above rubies. Clarke's particular talents as a writer appear to lie in the creation of comic situations. His dialogue does not crackle with wit or wisecrack—though he can write deliciously funny lines—but in his ability to contrive an ineffably complicated yet smoothly reciprocating

climax he has at present no equal in the British studios. His script for *The Lavender Hill Mob*—the story of a mild little bank-clerk who, after about 25 years of unblemished rectitude, absconds with an entire vanload of bullion—has not the flashing originality of his *Passport to Pimlico*, but it has a climax which, in its comic complexity, is worthy of Chaplin. Guinness, as usual, is completely submerged in his role, and Stanley Holloway as his accomplice in crime measures up remarkably well in such exacting company. I was just sorry that these two cheerful criminals weren't allowed to get away with it. I don't think anyone's morals would have been much harmed—it's doubtful if even the banks themselves could get their hands on a load of bullion these days.

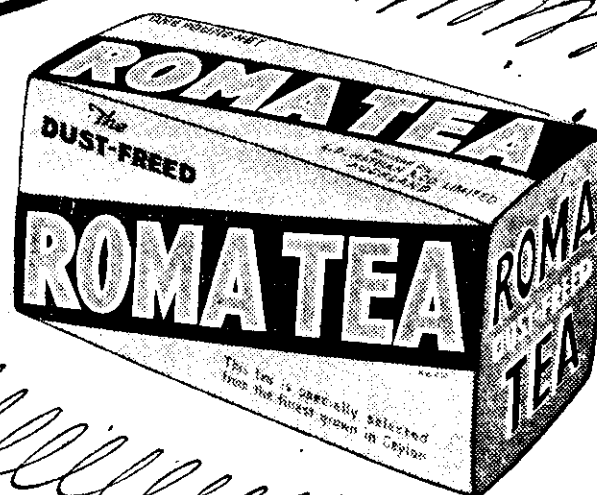


GENE KELLY, LESLIE CARON

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 24, 1952.

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