

LA DONNA E MOBILE

UNWANTED WOMEN

(Navona-London Films)

IT has been difficult this week to get away from women—luckless women, dedicated women, or just plain womanly women (if Miss Lana Turner doesn't mind being placed in the last category). But I cannot complain—such being the nature of things, and of women—that there has been any lack of diversity. I have been offered the Technicolored Escape that Hollywood imagines we so frequently desire; there has also been (from the same quarter) an invitation to gentle melancholy, and a Hungarian director named Geza Radvanyi has kicked me savagely in the spiritual solar plexus.

Unwanted Women (or "Women Without Names," as it was originally titled) is one of the ranker growths of the post-war Italian cinema. *Open City*, *Vivere in Pace*, *Bicycle Thieves* set high standards—indeed, these and other films of the same vintage gave the Italian film industry an unchallenged lead in the immediate post-war years. Lately, however, there have been indications that Italian producers (perhaps with their eyes on the inhibited Anglo-Saxon world and their ears tuned to the soft whisper of hard currency) are prepared to lace their realism with a strong infusion of sex. Filmgoers may have noticed this tendency in *Bitter Rice*, and they will find it again in *Unwanted Women*. Indeed, if they read the advertisements, they will expect to find it.

Yet *Unwanted Women* (like *Bitter Rice*) needs no such adventitious assistance to stir our emotions or command our attention. It puts a finger on one of the crumbling places in our civilisation and its theme, drawn from the almost hopeless world of a DP detention camp for women, strikes directly at the human conscience. There is little hope in it, and less happiness, but it is not in the sexy posturings of some of the cast that the dramatic relief is to be found. These occasional passages jarred on me, as I imagine they will jar on anyone whose sympathies have been engaged by the plight of these unfortunates. What relief there is comes from the realisation that even among the rejected and the hopeless there is still comradeship and kindness. These saving graces are underlined gently and tenderly by Radvanyi in numerous moving passages, but elsewhere the film suffers from the sins of over-emphasis—the rows are rowdier than they need to be, the rain wetter, the soundtrack more cacophonous. One is bludgeoned rather than knifed.

And, yet, on balance the good preponderates. For this much of the credit goes to the cast. I did not greatly enjoy Simone Simon's *gamine* part, but Valentina Cortese's portrayal of the young Yugoslav who tries desperately (and unsuccessfully) to break out of camp so that her baby may not be born in a prison, was tender and touching. Françoise Rosay, as a worldly-wise countess whom the war has also left without means of identification or livelihood, contributes the best-sustained of the supporting roles, but the most engaging character in the story was, I thought, the camp commandant (Mario Ferrari). His brusque sympathy for his charges—

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "Unwanted Women."
FAIR: "The Blue Veil."
DULL: "The Merry Widow."

which seems to spring from the knowledge that he, being a man under authority, is as much a prisoner of circumstances as they are—is generally much more interesting to observe than are the more uncomplicated emotions of the women themselves.

THE BLUE VEIL

(RKO-Radio)

THIS production by the Hollywood team of Jerry Wald and Norman Krasna (of a screenplay by our old friend Norman Corwin) has a bunch of well-known names at the mast-head—Jane Wyman, Charles Laughton, Joan Blondell, Agnes Moorehead, Richard Carlson—but it is in fact a marathon performance by Jane Wyman, plus a handful of small character-studies on the side. Some of these smaller sketches are vivid enough (Joan Blondell's is the best of them), but it is Miss Wyman who holds the centre of the stage. So far as she can, she makes this a satisfying picture, but her talent, sound as it is, can't produce figs from thorns, grapes from thistles, or any very solid drama from this sentimental story. As the dedicated "nanny," who spends her love and energy on other people's children, her performance (from blooming youth to withered age) is one of those essays in gentle melancholy that draw tears from teenagers and tired mothers. Being a hardened viewer I did not weep, but I gave three loud sniffs for Mr. Corwin and his mushily sentimental ending.

THE MERRY WIDOW

(M.G.M.)

WITH Lana Turner as the Widow and Fernando Lamas as Count Danilo, Franz Lehar's cheerful little operetta sparkles like a beaker of warm beer. There is, it is true, a modicum of strenuous rah-rah-ing in and around Maxim's, Lamas sings three songs passably well, the Technicolor is lush and the settings are the best that dollars can buy—but, in the circumstances, anything less merry, less like Lehar, it would be an effort to imagine. Miss Turner attempts a few bars of the theme-song (in what is, I presume, a technicoloratura voice) but gives it up hurriedly. I gave up shortly afterwards and went home.

Rhythm of a City

(Arne Suckesdorff)

THIS short supporting film—by one of Europe's ablest film artists—was shown in Wellington along with *Unwanted Women*, and provided a full house with about fifteen minutes of unalloyed delight. It is the record of a summer's day in Stockholm, from dawn (gulls soaring gracefully over spires and harbour and the early morning sun creeping slowly across cobbled squares) until dusk descends slowly in the late evening. It is beautiful all the way, but it is also humorous in a gentle civilised fashion: Only a first-class artist could have made it, but everyone can enjoy it. It is well worth watching for and inquiring about.

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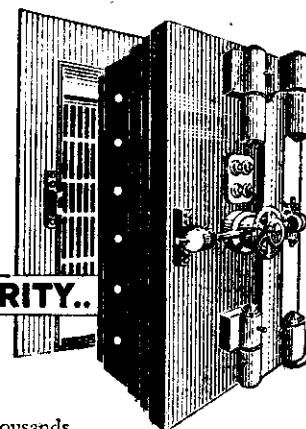
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