

TALKING OF TALKIES

An Ugly Duckling Goes to Paradise

"The Gay Divorcee," a Stage Show that Nobody Wanted, Made Into a Sensational Film with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers—New Year's Eve in Christchurch Cinemas

"THE GAY DIVORCEE," the musical comedy which has been made into a film by R.K.O. with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, had an extremely chequered career as a stage show in America. It was written as a "straight" play some years ago, but producers would have nothing to do with it, and it went from one to another, collecting dust in many a pigeon-hole—on one or two occasions it was secured by producers who needed a show quickly, but something better always turned up at the last minute, and "The Gay Divorcee" was pigeon-holed once more.

Finally it fell into the hands of the well-known New York directors, Dwight Wiman and Tom Weatherley, who conceived the idea of transforming the play into a musical comedy, and starring Fred Astaire in it. The show opened in the Barrymore Theatre in New York, and received an excellent reception from the audiences, but the critics were most unkind. After the depressing press notices, the producers expected that they would have to close within a fortnight. Then, believing that it was a good show, they decided to outface the critics and let it grow by word of mouth. It was moved to another theatre, and ran for 288 consecutive nights to the amazement of the unfortunate critics who had decided that it was no good. From New York it went to London for a run of six months, and it was so popular there that there was a chorus of protest when R.K.O., having bought the film rights, closed the show and took Fred Astaire to Hollywood to make the picture; eventually, another London run of the show was promised for next season. Very acceptable fortunes were reaped by everyone connected with "The Gay Divorcee" as the play which had been an "ugly duckling" became a swan at last.

While keeping the original story, which has been described as one of the funniest plots ever given to a musical comedy, intact, R.K.O. have elaborated the show into something far beyond even the wildest dreams of its author, who said, when he saw the completed film, "My ugly duckling has gone to Paradise!" The twelve chorus girls who appeared in the stage show, disappeared, and in their places have appeared fifty, with fifty male dancers opposite them. The one-star cast of Fred Astaire has been enlarged to Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Alice Brady and Edward Everett Horton—all well-known for their comedy work in many good films. Two members of the original stage cast have also been retained in addition to Astaire.

The settings have been magnified almost unrecognisably—the conventional three acts of the stage piece have been changed to thirteen, and the action takes place against the most elaborate backgrounds—including a futuristic representation of an hotel

fifty years from now. The suites in this amazing building are lined with fur, and the beds have fur-covered headboards and footboards.

The music has been augmented by many new song hits, and several attractive dances. One of the highlights is "The Continental" the new dance performed by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, which is said to be as sensational as their dancing of "The



AUNT HORTENSE.—Alice Brady is cast in the new R.K.O.-Radio musical comedy, "The Gay Divorcee," as "Aunt Hortense," and her comedy scenes with Edward Everett Horton provide some of the best fun of the picture.

Carioca" in "Flying Down to Rio." "The Continental" is intended to interpret a romance, from the first meeting to the betrothal kiss, and experts say it contains elements of the Rumba, Waltz, Fox Trot, and several courtly movements from the old minuet.

EVER since the first year of talking pictures, midnight matinees have been organised by the Christchurch Regent Theatre's ambitious manager, Mr. Noel Roake. The venture was greeted with a lot of scepticism, but that it has proved highly successful was demonstrated by the packed audiences which greeted the entertainment at four of the theatres in Christchurch last New Year's Eve. The Regent Theatre certainly put on a very ambitious show, and with an orchestra under Mr. Albert Bidgood and an excellent programme of vaudeville, community singing, the presentation of a large collection of worth-while gifts, finishing with the film "Change of Heart," the large crowd tripped out into the Square at 2 o'clock in the morning, thoroughly satisfied that 1935

had been well and truly ushered in. The audience gave a bolsterous welcome to Mr. Alan Brown when he appeared on the stage and began to lead them in community singing. Several favourite songs were sung "for the last time in 1934," and then, on the stroke of midnight, the audience rose in their seats, joined hands and welcomed 1935 with "Auld Lang Syne," while from the top of the circle, streamers curled out and downward. There was an air of happiness and good-fellowship about the moment that must have impressed everybody.

As each patron had come in, he or she had been given a numbered ticket, and many of these numbers corresponded with tickets on the gifts. Mr. Brown would read out a number from the stage which would be acknowledged by a delighted voice from the audience, and off would run one of the ushers to deliver the gift, a basket on wires being used to transport the gifts from the stage to the circle. The chance of being the holder of a winning ticket kept everybody interested, and the New Year was nearly an hour old before the screening of the picture was commenced. Mr. George Titchener, another popular friend of listeners, led the community singing at the Tivoli Theatre for their Midnight Matinee.

REAL artistry is displayed in Bing Crosby's latest film, "She Loves Me Not," shown at the Majestic Theatre, Wellington, last week, especially in the scene where Bing and Kitty Carlisle croon to each other over the telephone wires. Billowing white clouds moving across the sky by the branch of a tree, a slanting telegraph pole separating the two lovers, made a really first-rate photographic study. Perhaps the most memorable feature of this uproariously funny film was the massed singing of the Princeton University students when Bing and his friend were about to leave the university in disgrace.

APPARENTLY the way thriller-writers for the movies go about their business is to assemble a crowd of characters, murder the most attractive to arouse the sympathy of the audience, and then cast suspicion on half the players. This was the means employed in "The Crime of Helen Stanley," which thrilled and intrigued Wellington audiences last week. A mysterious diary kept by an actress, Helen Stanley, who was the victim, was the means of giving a clue to Inspector Trent, who was played by Ralph Bellamy. Indeed, Inspector Trent kept things buzzing along at such a rate while unravelling the mystery that there was no need to relieve the film with love scenes. The audience was completely carried away by the mystery and entirely baffled till the final "shot."