

"Surprised And Grieved"

"RECORD" CRITICISM ALLEGED TO BE UNJUST

WE have received from Mr. B. Vinsen, New Zealand manager of Columbia Pictures, a copy of a letter sent him by Alec Grant, manager of the Plaza Theatre, Napier, on the subject of his audiences' reaction to the Grace Moore picture, "I'll Take Romance," at that theatre. Mr. Vinsen expresses himself as being surprised and grieved to read our review of "I'll Take Romance" in the "Record" of April 22, and voices the opinion that publication of Mr. Grant's letter will be sufficient to convince readers that our criticism of the film was unjust.

We are pleased to reproduce the most pertinent portions of the letter, as follows:—

Dear Mr. Vinsen,

You hold the record now for the greatest gross this theatre has ever taken in any one day. . . . My warmest thanks to yourself and Columbia for the splendid "box-office" winners you have furnished me with, and in "I'll Take Romance" you worthily follow up your grand record.

The whole proof of the pudding is in the eating, and many of my patrons are coming not once, but three or four times.

on the other hand, of course, they might have chosen somebody much less capable than he is. But Connolly's true niche is in comedy, as the spluttering man of big business ("Nothing Sacred") or the harrassed father ("It Happened One Night")—and when he occupies that niche there is no one I admire more.

In "Penitentiary" he seldom convinced me that he was the dominating type needed to quell rebellious prisoners with a look.

Better cast is John Howard as the sensitive young man sent to jail for a long term for a drunken escapade that ended tragically. The prison governor, who knows the history of the case, takes an interest in the boy and saves him from being ruined by the atmosphere of the place, by giving him a position of trust. Even more important in the regeneration of the hero is the governor's daughter (played rather too demurely by Jean Parker). Then the hero is caught up in the unbreakable loyalties of the criminal code, involved in a murder within the prison, and almost destroyed by his refusal to "squeal" on another prisoner.

Dramatically Sound

"PENITENTIARY" gets its strength as entertainment mainly from the dramatic soundness of many of its situations—which erratic direction cannot spoil—and from the excellent supporting character studies, grimly presented by Robert Barratt, Arthur Hohl, Marc

The operatic excerpts are magnificent, the recording equally so, and many of my patrons have remarked. "They were so carried away that they have forgotten where they were, so great was the effect of those magnificent scenes and numbers."

Regarding the critics, well, I saw the "Radio Record" and have felt sick ever since. The young man writing was obviously conscientious and doubtless knew dramatic construction, but in matters operatic may Le Bon Dieu forgive him.

Alec. Grant.

We should like to congratulate the manager of the Plaza Theatre, Napier, on having sold a Grace Moore picture so well to his public that it was able to do such excellent business in Easter Week. In our review we suggested the fact that "I'll Take Romance" would possess box-office appeal. Nor did we dispute its operatic excellence, which Mr. Grant apparently believes is of such importance that it outweighs all other aspects of the picture. This is what our critic said on the subject: "In the first place, the music is excellent. . . . Grace Moore's duet with Frank Forest in a 'Madame Butterfly' aria is far and away the best bit of film opera I have heard . . . very rich food for music-lovers."

In view of this we fail to see the necessity for forgiveness, either by Le Bon Dieu, or Messrs. Vinsen and Grant.

THE EDITOR.

Lawrence, and one or two others, whose names I don't know.

Incidentally, I saw "Penitentiary" before Columbia put their ban upon me because of the "Record's" review of "I'll Take Romance"—which is why I am able to write about this picture in advance of its public release.

["Penitentiary." Columbia. Directed by John Brahm, starring Walter Connolly, John Howard, Jean Parker. First release: May 27.]

N.Z. Boy Pianist

EXCELLENT reports have been received from Sydney about the musical progress of Junior Farrell, talented New Zealand boy pianist. He sat for a scholarship this year and was commended. Considering that dozens applied, and some very fine players among them, this was a very good effort indeed, and it is stated that his youth was probably the main obstacle to his receiving the scholarship, the director of the Conservatorium not being in favour of giving it to anyone so young.

At present Junior Farrell is learning harmony from Mrs. Alfred Hill.



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