

SPEAKING CANDIDLY... REVIEWS of the NEW FILMS

Room Service With A Smile

["Room Service." R.K.O. Radio. Directed by William A. Seiter. Starring the Marx Brothers. First release: January.]

In the original cast of George Abbot's production of the farce "Room Service" were Sam Levene and Teddy Hart, two of the nutty people we saw in "Three Men on a Horse." The play was an instantaneous success, and ran for over a year on Broadway.

In the cast of R.K.O.'s screen version of "Room Service," the principal parts are filled by some even nuttier people, the Marx Brothers. And I think the film will be a success, too. At any rate, I hope so.

There can be no fence-sitting when it comes to the Marx Brothers. Either you laugh your buttons off, or you're bored stiff. With me, I'll admit, they are an article of faith, and I always imagine those who are bored stiff are in a very small minority.

Marx Brothers fans will be not a little surprised by "Room Service," Groucho, Chico and Harpo have an air of sanity about them for once. They adapt themselves to the requirements of a definitely demarcated plot. The tempo of

their comedy is about half what it normally is. But they're still funny.

Groucho's Gamut

GROUCHO surprised me most of all. He still affects a tremendous stride, a cigar and a wicked gleam in the eye, and he wise-cracks as of old. But in "Room Service" he runs a gamut from pure fooling to genuine dejection. And he really is dejected, not his



HARPO, GROUCHO, CHICO
"—an air of sanity about them."

old farcical despondency, but an utter dispiritedness.

Considering his troubles, it is not surprising. We see him as Mr. Gordon Miller, who is what our American cousins call a shoestring producer, i.e., a theatrical producer who has plenty of enthusiasm but little or no financial backing.

Groucho is indeed in trouble. He owes 1200 dollars on his hotel bill; his author lands in on him, impecunious and in love; his family, Chico and Harpo are evicted from their lodgings. ("His landlord threw him out, he owed six months' rent." "Well, six dollars is six dollars.") They, too, come to live with him.

Insanity

TRUE, a backer turns up, but after 15 minutes of the sort of collective insanity which only Groucho, Harpo and Chico know how to turn on, he flees for his life, a serious case of nervous prostration.

The amazing part is that while two hotel executives, a doctor, the impecunious author, our three friends and a courteous gentleman from the "I Never Sleep Collection Agency" are desperately outwitting each other, the play goes on and is a great success.

The transformation in Groucho I have already commented on. Chico and Harpo are also a little saner, which may be all to the good, especially with Harpo. But I was sorry these two had no opportunity to demonstrate their remarkable musical talent.

If I had space, I'd write a little appendix to this review—"Whither the Marx Brothers?" For it's evident they're out of their old niche and going some place. Where, I don't know.

Dip Into M.G.M.'s 1939 Basket

["Three Loves Has Nancy." M.G.M. Directed by Richard Thorpe. Starring Robert Montgomery, Janet Gaynor, Franchot Tone. First release, Wellington, December 23.]

["Fast Company." M.G.M. Directed by Edward Buzzell. Starring Melvyn Douglas and Florence Rice. First release, Wellington, date indefinite.]

AS we announced a week or two ago, a very important deal was recently completed when M.G.M. made arrangements for the disposal of their 1939 product in New Zealand. Immediate result was that last week about a dozen and a half assorted 1939 M.G.M. pictures arrived in Wellington to be previewed, assessed and generally summed up by the trade and similar important people.

I was not able to see all of them, but I did see some which will be released in the near future. You'll probably be hearing a lot more of



JANET GAYNOR
Enslaves two playboys.

them before long, but in the meantime here are some brief observations on "Three Loves Has Nancy" and "Fast Company," which you will soon be seeing.

"Three Loves Has Nancy" is done after the style of "Merrily We Live," and is notable for smart dialogue, happy-go-lucky action and polished performances from Robert Montgomery, Janet Gaynor and Franchot Tone.

Typical Style

MONTGOMERY, in typical style, plays the role of a popular author, and Tone is his publisher. Both these wealthy young men lead a pretty gay life, one's speciality being wine, and the other's, to put it bluntly, women.

Escaping from the clutches of an actress, Montgomery is accidentally involved with a simple, honest little country girl—Janet Gaynor, as you may have guessed. But it's not long before the simple little country girl has enslaved the hearts of both these playboys. Just another triangle, maybe, but it's a very amusing one.

Young Marrieds

I READ the other day that after quite a lot of salary trouble with Mr. William Powell, M.G.M. have at last decided to make another "Thin Man" picture, starring once again Mr. Powell and Miss Loy.

And it looks to me as if M.G.M., just to keep movie-goers in an appreciative frame of mind for thriller-comedies of the "Thin Man" type, decided to fill in a gap with "Fast Company."

"Fast Company" does not reach the standard of "The Thin Man" and its sequel, but it is on the same gay lines, concerning itself with a couple of bright young "marrieds" who are pitchforked into a murder mystery.

I've always had an admiration for Melvyn Douglas, and here again he extracts every ounce of entertainment. Florence Rice is certainly a decorative young woman.

Somehow, though, I don't imagine that "Fast Company" will create a couple of "Thin Man" characters. Perhaps it was not meant to.

The Strange Story Of Ferdinand

["Ferdinand the Bull." R.K.O. Radio. Walt Disney colour cartoon. Release date: Watch for it.]

THIS is the story of Ferdinand the Bull. He started life as a little bull calf in far-away Spain, but he was not like the other little Spanish bull calves, who frisked in the meadows and butted their heads together (clink). No, Ferdinand used to sit under a cork tree, and think beautiful thoughts and smell the pretty flowers (big long sniff).

And when he grew up and was a fine big bull, he never tried to impress the matadors and picadors and toreadors that came out from Madrid to select the fiercest bulls for the bull-ring. No, Ferdinand still liked to sit under the cork tree and think beautiful thoughts and smell the pretty flowers (big long sniff).

But one day Ferdinand was cruelly stung in the haunch by a bad-



tempered bumble bee, and he made such a scene that the matadors and picadors and toreadors who were watching, said, "Bravo, Ferdinand, you are just the sort of bull we want in our bull-ring."

So Ferdinand was taken to Madrid, and the day of the bull-fight all the best people of Madrid came to see him, and the proudest toreador in all Madrid was also there to do battle with Ferdinand.

Now, Ferdinand was very frightened at all this, but it happened that a beautiful senorita had thrown a garland of flowers to the toreador, and when Ferdinand saw the flowers he thought "Ah, here is a nice man," and instead of doing battle with the toreador, he took the garland away from him and sat down in the bull-ring and smelled the beautiful flowers (several big, long sniffs).

The toreador broke his sword over his knee and wept, but there was nothing they could do about it, and eventually they took Ferdinand back to his cork tree, and there he

still sits, thinking beautiful thoughts and smelling the pretty flowers (big, long sniff).

And if you don't enjoy Walt Disney's colour cartoon about Ferdinand, the aesthetic bull, you should go and have your sense of humour attended to.

Action Pictures, 1939 Programme

EARLY in 1937, the independent film exchange of Action Pictures began business in New Zealand. Since then it has grown and established itself, and the company's schedule of releases for its third season, which has just been issued by D. Russell Rankin, managing director, reveals many interesting attractions for 1939.

Pride of place goes to two Charles Laughton films, produced by the famous star in co-operation with Erich Pommer (celebrated German producer). Laughton will first be seen as the star of a musical production entitled "St. Martin's Lane," in company with Vivien Leigh, Larry Adler, Rex Harrison and Gus McNaughton. The second picture is "Vessel of Wrath," from a story by W. Somerset Maugham.

Other attractions will be James Cagney in "Great Guy"; a series featuring "Renfrew of the Royal Mounted"; and three romances starring Eric Linden and Cecilia Parker, well known as the young lovers of the "Judge Hardy" pictures. Melvyn Douglas will star in a horror picture, "The Vampire Bat." Anna Sten will return in two big pictures.

It was Action Pictures who introduced Sandy Powell as a screen star to New Zealand. He is scheduled for two more films in 1939. Gene Autry is another popular star introduced to this country by the company. His first release for them for 1939 will be an ambitious musical Western, "In Old Santa Fe."

In 1939, the company will introduce the British singing and dancing child star, Hazel Ascutt, her first film being "Stepping Toes." George Houston, who created a very favourable impression in "Wallaby Jim of the Island," will star in "Captain Calamity" (Technicolor) and as Wild Bill Hickok in "Frontier Scout."

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