

Twentieth Century Marches by in Coward's "Cavalcade"

Private Screening In Wellington With New Wide Range Reproduction

What does "Cavalcade" mean? What is the message behind it all? Is it spurring us on to deeds of war, or is it preaching pacifism—a British Empire held together by the bonds of trade and friendship, honoured by other countries, and an example to the world? These questions, and many others, New Zealanders will be able to answer for themselves very shortly, when the Fox masterpiece, "Cavalcade," adapted from Noel Coward's record-breaking play, is generally released in the Dominion.

But, for the people who gathered at Wellington's St. James Theatre for a private screening of the talkie, the other evening, there were two thrills—this great picture and Western Electric's new wide range reproduction, quite rightly heralded as the greatest advance since talking pictures were introduced.

"CAVALCADE" brings to us something that we are inclined to joke about in our self-conscious English way—a tremendous pride in being British. From the moment it opens at a minute or two before midnight on the last day of the nineteenth century to the last scene of the present day, one lives and feels the joys and sorrows of the Marryot family—a decent English family, God-fearing, conventional, trying desperately hard to hold its head aloft in the succession of bewildering events that have marked the first 33 years of the twentieth century.

One of the most impressive moments of the whole play is the passing of Queen Victoria's funeral, and it is here that Noel Coward's genius is shown. The family is gathered on the balcony, watching the cortege pass. There is a sense of sorrow—of personal sorrow—that is imparted to the audience in an almost uncanny way. The younger son, Joey, looks up at his mother—"She must have been a very little lady, mummy." Just those words, simply spoken, but the moment was the most dramatic of the whole story.

Another fine scene—a musical comedy of 30 years ago is in progress. The theatre is crowded, but there is a feeling of oppression hanging over the audience. The theatre manager comes on to the stage, and silences the orchestra and singers—"Ladies and gentlemen, Mafeking has been relieved."

A moment of silence, and then wave after wave of cheering and a delirious crowd joining hands and singing "Auld Lang Syne."

The night before the Great War. London in August—a hot, silent night—the doors of the Marryots' drawing-room thrown open to admit the muffled sounds of the traffic in Piccadilly Circus. Big Ben strikes the midnight hour—a swelling sound of cheering in the Mall—nearer, nearer, louder, louder—we are at war with Germany.

"Cavalcade" leaves one silent—a sense of pride, a sense of shame, perhaps, but an overwhelming feeling that here, in our own lifetime, we have lived the most stupendous page of history that has ever been written. And, in bringing ourselves back to the realisation that "Cavalcade" is "just a picture," we must offer the heartiest congratulations to the Fox Company which has produced one of the greatest motion pictures yet made—and that's a genuine opinion.

And the gathering at the private screening in Wellington must count itself fortunate that it heard "Cavalcade" under the most perfect conditions obtainable in the talking picture world—with the new wide range reproduction. A "test" reel was first played over, and the method explained. An orchestra played under the old conditions—quite good, we thought it, being accustomed to the usual talkie clarity. The wide range was switched on—the

instruments stood out (in fact, one might be forgiven for leaning over to discover whether there really was an 80-piece orchestra in the orchestra well), and the blur that is often associated with "canned" music had entirely disappeared.

Sound is the trembling of a violin's string, of a human note, of one body meeting another—and it is the capturing of these in correct synchronisation that has made talkies possible. But, by the translation to the screen many of the finer tones have been lost. Wide range has brought them back, and all the delicacy and power of the dramatist's art have been translated to the screen.

The most emotional moments of "Cavalcade" were high-lighted by the new reproduction—a product of Western Electric. When Jane Marryot lifts her glass to drink to England, "this country of ours which we love dearly," it becomes a personal toast—her voice is thrown back with all its lights and shades, its emotions and strength, and we feel that we have established a definite bond with the people on the screen.

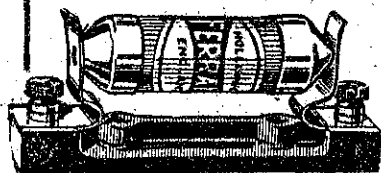
Wide range reproduction is just being installed in American theatres, so New Zealand is well in the advance guard so far as this amazing new invention is concerned.

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