

The Courier Covers

THE NEW MOVIES

By John Springer

(Editor's Note: Listed as Class B, objectionable in part, by the National Legion of Decency, this week, "One Thrilling Night"; objection: "Suggestiveness in theme.")

It's the Players Who Count

The best you can say for the pictures of the week is that there are

some good actors who somehow or other got involved in them. By good actors, I specifically do not mean Doty Lamour, who is again the simian chum in "Beyond the Blue Horizon." I also do not mean Richard Denning who has been around before but will probably be seen more often now that he has established himself as a beautiful boy who looks good with Doty in Technicolor. The actors include people like Walter Abel and Patricia Morrison and someday, I

hope, they will have their revenge for "Beyond the Blue Horizon."

No meteoric ups-and-downs for Pat O'Brien. He's a big, homely swick who has lasted on the screen for years by virtue of being one of our most reliable actors — as straightforward a performer in any little "B" picture in which he is cast as in such more demanding roles as Rockne, Glenn Ford and William Holden are two of the screen's younger leading men — both intelligent young actors who have consistently shown marked progress. Frances Dee is an attractive and able actress who is seen all too seldom.

The four of them — O'Brien and Ford in "Flight Lieutenant," Holden and Dee in "Meet the Stewarts" — are responsible for making two program pictures better entertainment than they should be. The first is a father and son thing which veers perilously close to maudlin sentimentality and misses it only because of the careful performances of O'Brien and Ford.

"Meet the Stewarts" is one of those saccharine little first year movies, but the Holden-Dee team keep it pleasant. In both pictures the situations are trite and the dialogue juvenile and one can imagine just how bad they would be if it weren't for the stellar foursome.

Frieda Inescort and Nils Asther, two of the screen's most handsome people, lend a slight touch of distinction to "Sweater Girl" and the picture needs it badly. Its only other distinction was that it featured the popular songs, "I Don't Want To Walk Without You" and "I Said No." Now that the movie is released, the songs aren't popular any more.

More About the Summer Stock

I was discussing the state of the theater with Otto Preminger, distinguished stage director and present movie actor, when he was here for the premiere of "Pied Piper." During the course of the conversation, he mentioned the crying need of the theater for young actors — not the hopefuls who arrive on Broadway every year with nothing to offer but a pretty face or a dentifrice smile — but the youngsters who are really serious about acting and who are prepared to work and struggle and sacrifice to gain their end. Later I talked to Monty Woolley about the same thing. Both Preminger and Woolley spoke of actual experience in summer stock as one of the most invaluable means of perfecting a young actor in his craft.

There is a group of just such serious and talented young actors in Rochester. As reported in one of these columns a few weeks back, the Rochester Summer Theater company has had a very full share of discouragement this summer. At one time it looked as if they would have to give up the whole idea. Then — just in time — things took a turn for the better. Word got around that they really had something here. Attendance has been building and so has audience satisfaction.

This week the company is presenting Lillian Hellman's outstanding drama, "Little Foxes," and the cast is augmented by three guest players: Margrit Weyer, the Viennese actress, Harold Dyrenforth, well known locally and on Broadway, and the conscientious and capable Francis Ballard. I have not seen "Little Foxes" at this writing, but I have covered most of the other productions which have been so well done by this competent group.

Among the players, there are at least two or three I think, with that little extra spark which should cause their names to gain increasing prominence in the theater. But all have very definite abilities. Let's take the ladies first. Sarahie Hedgo has shown surprising versatility in her performances of the year. She has played high comedy and heavy drama. She has played young girls, middle-aged mothers and elderly aunts. From her bright perform-

ance as Tracy Lord in "Philadelphia Story" to her sensitive handling of the difficult role of Miriamne, the wait of "Winter-set," her appearances have been something to look for.

Then there is Martha Falconet, a fluent and charming young actress, who plays with intelligence and humor. I liked Peggy Scott particularly well in "Rope's End" when she played one of those "teddily bright and teddily trivial" young Englishwomen and made the role amusing without caricaturing or overdoing it at all. Beisy Browning, Nancy Edwards and Ruth Harris are sufficient decoration for any stage although their roles haven't given them a chance to indicate their ability. Helen Danton, who has sparkled briefly, will have a better chance this week.

There is an excellent company of men in the organization. For instance, there is the accomplished Gene Lyons who has scored in a variety of roles, being particularly effective in "Philadelphia Story," "Brother Rat" and "Winter-set." His playing has grace and shading.

Berel Firestone did a compelling piece of acting in a difficult role in "Rope's End." He has done meritorious jobs, also, in "Winter-set" and "Brother Rat." His only fault is that occasionally he is inclined to be over-intense. That's a good fault, though some of our best actors have had it — and a too-intense actor can get down to normal much more quickly than a frigid actor can thaw out.

I deplore Director Altobelli's habit of casting Lawrence Slade in the role of a goof whenever a goof is needed. Slade handles sophisticated comedy with savvy, gave a thoroughly polished performance as the thrill-murderer in "Rope's End" and was outstanding as Judge Gaun in "Winter-set." But I can't believe him as Bing in "Brother Rat" or the sap from Oswego in "Room Service." "Room Service," however, did give Verne Armstrong a chance to provoke hilarity in his most suitable role. Armstrong, always a reliable character actor, also did much with the gentle Eadras in "Winter-set."

Wilford Scott is always welcome with his particular brand of comedy. Chester Flans bits have shown thought and other occasional bit-players range from pretty bad to pretty good.

As for Leonard Altobelli himself I have always admired him for his direction. I did not admire him at all as an actor when I saw him give what I considered an utterly affected performance in "Skylark" last year. I take it all back now. He was exceptional as the cynical Rupert in "Rope's End" and his reading of the tortured, tragic Mio in "Winter-set" was remarkably effective. And, of course, he is the guiding spirit behind the excellence of the company as a whole. Amy H. Croughton said, "You owe it to yourself to see them." I echo that sentiment.

"Lady in a Jam"—A-2

Irene Dunne has already proven her versatility at drama, operetta, sophisticated comedy and farce. It seems unnecessary for her to be made to prove that she is a rival for Gracie Allen, too. But, one of the most gracious and capable ladies of the screen, she finds herself at a loss in "Lady in a Jam" which makes her play one of those supposedly delightful scatterbrains, whose antics make it more logical to suppose that she is a congenital idiot. Gregory LaCava, usually one of the most intelligent and reliable directors handles the synthetic yarn with almost complete lack of verve and spontaneity.

(John Springer reminisces about the Leslie Howard-Bette Davis drama, "Of Human Bondage," on "Your Movie Memory" over WSAI, Monday morning at 10.)

Prayer is more work of the heart than of the head; it should therefore, be simple effective and sincere.

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