

Are There 'Unrate-able' Pictures? A 'Funny Thing' You Should Ask

New York — A "current example of questionable movie-making," wrote film critic Charles Oxtan in a number of Catholic diocesan papers.

"Chalk this one up as one of the best comedies of the year," said John Fitzgerald about the same film in "The Catholic News," the New York archdiocesan weekly.

Both critics were commenting on "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," the latest in a growing number of films that some Catholic film office reviewers are coming to regard as "unrate-able." That is, even if there is a heavy consensus toward one particular moral category (such as was the case in the "adults, with reservations" classification given to "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?") there is much to be said for "the other side."

Therefore, this line of reasoning goes, the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures should not give a specific rating to such films but, instead, should give a brief summary and point out whatever elements might prove offensive. This, it's said, would do away with much "shock" on the part of those who can't accept NCOMP's "approval" of certain films.

The moral rating that NCOMP has given to "A Funny Thing" is A-3 (morally objectionable for adults), even though the musical comedy borrows some of its style from burlesque and much of its humorous action takes place in or around a house of prostitution in ancient Rome.

"It is all supposed to be very witty and, possibly, symbolic, but it misses the mark badly," wrote Oxtan, who suggested that no honest Christian would be seen patronizing the film.

But, although some of NCOMP's reviewers took exception to the "bawdy, vulgar" tone of the picture — several scantily-clad women do a series of dances that NCOMP would normally label "suggestive" — the film office went along with the majority of its reviewers who saw "A Funny Thing" as a satire whose swift-paced comedy would cancel out what-



Phil Silvers, the late Buster Keaton, Jack Gilford and Zero Mostel clowning in "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum."

ever erotic elements the film might contain.

Taken into account were the direction of Richard Lester (whose bouncy camera work made hits of the two Beatles films) and the comic performances by Zero Mostel, Buster Keaton, Jack Gilford and — as the proprietor of the bawdy house — Phil Silvers.

Mostel portrays a slave who convinces his freedom by arranging a tryst between his master's son and a young virgin who is being held in the house of prostitution until she can be claimed by a Roman warrior who has purchased her. The plot, which borrows from the stories of Plautus and Terence, makes use of sleeping druggs, love potions, impersonations, mistaken identity, long-lost children and men parading as women in order to deceive the warrior, — "Miles Gloriosus" — whose

"triumphal entry" into Rome is one of the film's comic high-points.

"The resulting madness," wrote "America's" Moira Walsh, Plautus and human cussedness "manages to kid Terence and in about equal proportions."

Several reviewers for NCOMP saw the film's bawdy style as being "healthier than a number of more artistic films" that treat sex with a "subtly insinuating" effect.

Nonetheless, NCOMP's A-3 classification is certain to be protested by Catholics opposed to a burlesque treatment of sex on the screen. "God help us when the time comes for it to be sold to TV," commented Oxtan in discussing "A Funny Thing."

But another indication that NCOMP may shortly be encouraged to revise its rating policy is that, while the reviewers generally agreed adults, the same might not be true of chil-

Theater News

Elizabeth, the Queen

by EUPHEMIA WYATT



ELIZABETH, THE QUEEN — In 1597, a Polish ambassador, in black velvet with bejeweled buttons, had the temerity to lecture Queen Elizabeth in fluent Latin before her courtiers on the annoyance she was causing the Poles by interfering with their commerce.

Without a moment's hesitation, the remarkable woman answered him in Latin as fluent as his own but of such vituperative vigor that it might have silenced Cicero. Later, she said to her court: "My Lords, I have been enforced thus to scout up my old Latin which has lain long rusting."

Privately she admitted to Cecil that she regretted that Essex had not heard her. Elizabeth was then sixty-three, she had kept England safe from invasion and made her small island a world power. She had also kept in thrall, for ten years, the most fascinating of the younger noblemen.

Essex was then thirty, tall, auburn haired as gallant a knight in the tiltyard as he was graceful on the dance floor. Romantic, spirited, cultured, the delight of the English public, he was sponsor to Leicester, the Queen's first favorite and first cousin, twice removed to the Queen herself but in his veins ran the blood royal of the Plantagenets, lacking in the Tudors.

Judith Anderson is a great tragedienne, playing her roles in bold outline but Elizabeth Tudor could laugh while she smothered herself in a cobweb of subtleties. The flame of Miss Anderson's Medea seems quenched in the intricacies of the Elizabethan costume.

The Queen and Essex were both avid for power. The Queen having to choose between her heart and her crown. When Essex, who had her heart, tried to seize her crown and refused to ask for pardon, she had to watch him leave her presence for the headsman and all that was sweet in life to her went with him.

Donald Davis as Essex is strongest in his camp scenes in Ireland. Sir Robert Cecil, frail and blonde whose sagacious mind was sheathed in an attenuated body is played by Michael Lombard, a swarthy stalwart. Sir Walter Raleigh seems more of a top than a soldier of fortune. Maxwell Anderson's verse drama was inspired by Lytton Strachey's historical study "Elizabeth and Essex" more

brilliant than the play in which the lines are more stilted than poetic. The very handsome production of Jean Dalrymple fails to revitalize a play that thirty years ago had the tonic of the Lunts and Lynn Fontanne's finest performance.

THE ROSE TATTOO — Maureen Stapleton's triumph as Rosa, a Sicilian truck driver's widow on the Gulf Coast in 1951 was revived at City Centre with popular acclaim. Rosa, vowing fidelity to her husband's memory, placed the urn with his ashes next to the statue of Our Lady and insisted that the sailor who loved her fifteen year old daughter must swear before the Madonna that he would respect little Rose's virtue.

Thus far, Tennessee Williams' play is full of warmth and humor. Then Rosa discovers that her husband was unfaithful and her world is shattered. In Act III she shatters both the urn and the Madonna, opens the back door to a lover and apparently will not hinder her daughter's ruin. For unadulterated paganism this may be a "happy ending." Mr. Williams discounts casually any real faith in Rosa.

"The Rose Tattoo" has moved in a rosate way to Billy Rose's Theatre where the cast deserves its success if not the playwright.

UNDER THE WEATHER — we are very content to report that the three obnoxious plays by Saul Bellow have closed after twelve performances.

LET'S SING YIDDISH — The grey haired Austrian, sitting next to us, suggested that this may be the Broadway swan song of a folk culture that has reached its climax in the American Theatre with "Fiddler on the Roof."

Yiddish, which is medieval German written in Hebrew script, is taboo in Israel where it is now understood only by grandparents so it is doubtful if any writer will pick up the torch of Sholem Aleichem, among the survivors of the Nazi holocaust.

Act I of the revue is made up of folk dances and songs which have a haunting echo of Gypsy cadences. The actors are so good that they carry Act II, also before World War One, in Castle Garden where the immigrants are introduced to America. The simple and very strong faith of these Hassidic Jews of Central Europe with their god-natured humor are a welcome tonic.

Peace Priests

Bonn — (NC) — The diocesan boards of the Czechoslovakian pro-government "peace priest" organization are now preparing for a congress of all the clergy of Czechoslovakia to be held Nov. 24 and 25.

Britten Cantata On St. Nicholas

Benjamin Britten, England's leading contemporary composer, has granted Central Presbyterian Church of Rochester, permission to create and produce with costumes, dance, sets and staging his cantata (Op. 42) "St. Nicholas."

Two performances are scheduled for Saturday and Sunday afternoons, Nov. 26 and 27 at 3 p.m. in the Central Church sanctuary, 50 Plymouth Ave. North. Admission is free and open to the public. Reservations for groups may be made by mail.

'Sixpence' Due At Auditorium

The Rochester Broadway Theatre League will present the musical "Half a Sixpence" as its second hit of their tenth anniversary season. The production will be shown at the Auditorium Theatre for two evening performances at 8:30 on Friday and Saturday, Dec. 9 and 10, and for a matinee at 2:30 on Saturday, Dec. 10.

This Broadway hit has been adapted from the H.G. Wells novel "Klippers," by Beverly Cross.

'Citizen Kane' At Nazareth

"Citizen Kane," Orson Welles' first and most famous film, will be the next attraction in the Nazareth College Film Series.

The motion picture, a biography of a newspaper tycoon, will be shown in the Nazareth College auditorium, Dec. 7, at 7:15 p.m. Admission is free and the general public is invited.

The program of ten films is sponsored by the College Lecture Committee. Each film is followed by coffee and discussion in the college cafeteria.

DEADLINE FOR NEWS
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FRIDAY DELIVERY

It concerns life in England at the turn of the century and tells of an overworked, underpaid young man who unexpectedly falls heir to a sizeable income. "Half a Sixpence" is one of the "dancingest" shows to be seen in many a season.

The cast is headed by Kenneth Nelson, understudy for the original star, Tommy Steele. Nelson appeared in the role on Broadway countless times. He has starred on Broadway in his own right in "Seventeen" and "The Fantasticks." In addition he has toured in "Stop the World I Want to Get Off" and "Roar of the Greasepaint," and has appeared on several television shows.

A large company of fifty is directed by Fred Herbert. The music and lyrics are by David Heneker; the dancing and musical numbers were staged by Ton Fanko.

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FILMS ABOUT TOWN

A MENTION OF MOTION PICTURES OF MONTHLY ROUTINE INTEREST

Any Wednesday — "A better movie than it was a play, and it was a pretty funny play. With Jane Fonda, Jason Robards, Rosemary Murphy and Dean Jones." — New Yorker Mag.

Georgy Girl — "Lynn Redgrave, James Mason, Alan Bates and Charlotte Rampling in an excellent English tragicomedy." — New Yorker Mag.

How To Steal a Million. "Another high comedy that treats thievery as an art form. This time the thief is Audrey Hepburn, her nimble accomplice is Peter O'Toole, and the setting for all the charming duplicity is Paris." — Time Mag.

Dead Heat on a Merry-Go-Round. "An intricate, sumptuously photographed melodrama about a successful bank robbery. Starring James Coburn, and written and directed by Bernard Girard." — New Yorker Mag.

Alfie — "A modern rake who regards women as convenient objects is brought to the realization that his way of life is senseless. Adult theme and controversial in treatment, the film succeeds as a contemporary morality play. With Michael Caine." — Catholic Film Newsletter.

The Fortune Cookie — "Walter Matthau and Jack Lemmon in a sour, funny comedy about a crooked lawyer mad his last-minute come-uppance. Directed by Billy Wilder." — New Yorker

Hotel Paradiso — "The locale of this beautifully photographed color and wide-screen effort is Paris in the first years of twentieth century. The story is a bedroom farce complete with mistaken identities and broad characterization. The cast is a first rate including Alec Guinness, Gina Lollobrigida, Robert Morley, Douglas Bryn and Akim Tamiroff. What producer-director Peter Glenville sadly omitted was the fast pace and split-second timing that this kind of thing requires." — Catholic Film Newsletter

The Liquidator — "British agent Trevor Howard engages Rod Taylor to kill suspected traitors before they can defect to the enemy. Taylor finds that he is unable to kill in cold blood; so, using some of his high pay, he hires a professional killer to do the job for him. This is the basic plot for some good tongue-in-cheek action material that director Jack Cardiff handles with diverting zest. Well photographed in color this is one of the better done espionage films." — Catholic Film Newsletter

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