

## From Reuters to the Sea

Daniel Todd reviews Hollywood's version of the British news agency and John Ford's "The Long Voyage Home." "Inside America" with the New Theater League.

REUTERS, as is pretty generally known, is the semi-official news agency of the British civil service. It is not official because top British civil servants are the world's most hypocritical people, and they don't like to function out in the open where other people can see them. Reuters is not a very reliable news service, except when it comes to spelling people's names. If you want to find out what is taking place in India, for example, there is no use going to Reuters. Reuters is an interested party, or at least a friend of an interested party. I am not going to give an expose of Reuters here, however, because it is practically indistinguishable from the British empire, and if you think the British empire is all right you will probably think the same about Reuters.

The story material in *A Dispatch from Reuters*, which celebrates this news agency, is the least likely of the season. Warner Bros. have a kind of master plot for their screen biographies, and after Zola, Pasteur, Ehrlich, and others, the story of Julius Reuter has few surprises. The way the Brothers do it is this: they first show a child growing up somewhere in Europe, and right away the child shows an interest in something out of the ordinary—say a common cold. He notices that all the people in his hometown go round half the winter with their noses stopped up, feeling miserable. Then he grows up to be Edward G. Robinson and after messing around in the laboratory for a few reels, he discovers a cure for the common cold, which none of the authorities in the medical profession will take seriously. They call it Edward G. Robinson's folly. He has acquired a rather plain wife by this time, and she gives him courage. At last the authorities have to admit that he really has discovered a cure for the common cold, and they apologize handsomely. He delivers a speech about freedom of scientific inquiry and the authorities look shamefaced.

Perhaps *A Dispatch from Reuters* follows this pattern a little too closely. The child, Edward G. Robinson, bumps into a courier for the *London Times*, and he is impressed with the romance of news gathering. Next thing you know, he is trying to persuade business men to subscribe to a stock quotation service supplied by carrier pigeon. The business men say it can't be done. Then when they cotton up to that idea, he produces another—carrying news by telegraph. Everyone says it's preposterous. Inasmuch as the audience already knows how both these matters are going to turn out, the suspense is negligible.

...ure would not be worth much

comment if it weren't for the speeches in it about freedom of the press. It was released several weeks after the close of National Free Press week, when the subject of the free press, as you remember, called forth a great deal of oratory from prominent figures. *A Dispatch from Reuters* is a moving picture version of *Editor & Publisher's* special free press edition, and its spirited defense of a free press will in all probability not bowl anybody over. People are more knowing about the press than this picture gives them credit for being. They may not realize the full Pecksniffery of holding up Reuters as an example, but if the Warner Bros. think that after publishers have used the free press argument to get out of paying alimony, they can still fool anybody by that kind of talk, they are crazy.

Anyone who wishes a review of *Knute Rockne—All American*, which I have been disappointed in ever since it proved impractical to photograph Pat O'Brien wearing a halo, will please communicate with me directly, enclosing a self-addressed stamped envelope.

"THE LONG VOYAGE HOME"

Everything about *The Long Voyage Home*, directed by John Ford, reveals the fact that it was put together out of four separate one-act plays written years ago by Eugene O'Neill. O'Neill was never much of a hand at plots, and the nearest he got to a plot in this collection deals with a high-born Englishman who leaves his family because of the curse of Drink. That isn't the type of plot to which movie audiences are accustomed in 1940, and so John Ford and Dudley Nichols, his scenarist, arranged to have the tramp steamer on which the high-born Englishman is escaping from Drink sail a cargo of munitions through the submarine blockade to England. Such an undertaking, which is now a commonplace to British seamen, might appear to be dangerous and highly exciting. That it is not in *The Long Voyage Home* is due to John Ford's preoccupation with the atmosphere and mood of life at sea.

There is a great deal of conversation in the picture about the sea, but an oiler of my acquaintance assures me that present day seamen do not make a practice of lying around in the sun, remarking that land doesn't want them any more, and that the sea gets into their blood. The NMU, he reminded me, is one of the most militant American unions, and Joe Curran is running for Congress and putting up a good fight, too. Seamen do not get that way because of the eternal restless-

ness of the sea. Eating bad food and crowded into a fore-castle with so many bedbugs that they once threw a seaman bodily out of his bunk, seamen talk politics, especially in a war zone. However, nobody talks politics on board the *Glencairn*.

This is a legitimate gripe. John Ford could have made a picture telling a story if he had wanted to. The suspense involved in sailing munitions through the English Channel would seem to be right up the alley of the director of *Stagecoach*. On the other hand, he could have made a realistic picture about seamen, which would not have been beyond the capabilities of the director of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Actually, except for one brief sequence when the ship is attacked by German planes, Ford forgets that the *Glencairn's* cargo is propellant powder, and except for another brief sequence during a storm the seamen do not appear to have to do any work. And the total lack of content in the picture makes Ford seem to dwell too long on his carefully composed shots of cobblestone waterfronts on a rainy night. Blame it on Eugene O'Neill.

DANIEL TODD.

## "Inside America"

The New Theater League's revue is topical and ingenious.

IF YOU can spend 55c or 77c for a Friday evening's entertainment, it should find you in the Malin Studio Theater (135 West 44th St., NYC) enjoying the New Theater League's intimate musical called *Inside America*. It's a topical revue, presented by five talented and energetic young non-professionals, who nevertheless offer a highly professional show, worth twice the money.

The New Theater League's Friday evenings have been too sadly neglected by both the left wing press and its audience. This particular evening features some pretty clever political satire that you are unlikely to see elsewhere. Mel Tolkin and Reuben Davis, who should be remembered for their last revue, *We Beg to Differ*, are an accomplished pair in their field. Tolkin writes words and music, ingenious, delightful, topical; Davis does the sketches.

There are a few really hilarious numbers, and an unusually high percentage of good tunes. Number among them *Money Isn't Everything*, followed appropriately by *But It Helps; All's Well in the USA; Let's Have a Drag at That Too. Me Minus You* is a fresh love song that has Tin Pan Alley way

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in the rear, and a fine song called *Mother Love*, with the refrain "Don't kill your mother on Mother's Day" provides an opportunity for Phil Leeds and Edna Gerstler to really go to town.

The other three members of the cast—there are only five—Tom Frank, Rosalyn Marshall, and John Wynne (who directed) are all youngsters without more than a shadow of professional training, who are born mimics with personalities of their own. And since they're not likely to get Broadway encouragement, it's up to us to provide it. And with no condescension, either.

ALVAH BESSIE.

## Folk Music

The American Ballad Singers and Siegmeister do it well.

WHEN the American Ballad Singers made their Town Hall debut last season, audiences and critics were unanimous in their praise. Their first concert this season at the Brooklyn Academy of Music not only confirmed the original enthusiasm but increased it.

This is an extraordinary group. Seated informally around a table, three men and three women, they perform feats of magic with ballads and folk songs, that can place the most phlegmatic person under their spell. Possessors of splendid ensemble, blend, beautiful solo voices, lucid diction, and above all a closeness to the authentic character of their folk subjects, this group has practically everything. It is hard to choose which number you enjoy most or which member of this group is more outstanding than another.

Earl Rogers' splendid tenor solo of "Poor Wayfaring Stranger," a spiritual which I feel to be one of the finest melodies ever conceived, was matched by Evelyn McGregor's singing of the hilarious "Springfield Mountain." Emile Renan, a marvelous baritone was all Irish in "Pat Works on the Railroad." Ruth Fremont sang admirably in "Link O'Day" and Eli Siegmeister's "Song of Democracy" brought the house down.

To Siegmeister, the director of the group, must go a large share of the credit. This young man, whose gifts are as diverse as they are fine, is rapidly becoming the outstanding authority on American musical folk-lore. For many years, he has tirelessly pioneered in assembling and popularizing the vast treasury of American folk music. By breaking through the tradition of concert halls which has consistently excluded folk music, he has won an important battle. Victor is releasing an album of ballads sung by his group and Howell Soskin is publishing his book which contains many of his collections and arrangements of folk songs. These are developments that cannot be overestimated.

The American Ballad Singers are my favorites. They will be yours as soon as you hear them.

LOU COOPER.

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