

# SR Goes to the Movies

## IN AND OUT OF THE RUT



—From "Just For You."

"... Bing has charmed Ethel Barrymore into a tizzy."

**P**AT DUGGAN is a gentleman whom some Hollywood cognoscenti regard as representing the new look in producers. He rose to his present job at Paramount through none of the methods so dear to the novelists who fictionally explore Hollywood, but by working as a successful literary agent, Broadway producer, studio story editor, assistant to Samuel Goldwyn, and vice president of the Goldwyn Corporation. These would seem qualifications enough. "Just for You," a musical, is his first project for Paramount, and it stars such genial and eminent people as Bing Crosby, Jane Wyman, and Ethel Barrymore. Other eminent names are in the list of credits: Elliot Nugent as director, Helen Tamiris, choreographer, Robert Carson, screenwriter. More names are available. John Van Druten is reputed to have done some of the story treatment, and a short story, "Famous," by

Stephen Vincent Benét, furnished the basis for the movie.

Mr. Duggan's general idea, a studio representative has informed me, was to do something different in the way of a musical. In fact, the studio has used the term "musical-drama" to describe the offering, implying that not only does it have a series of song-and-dance numbers, but that it tells a story of substance as well. "Just for You" started out as a non-musical, and it was Mr. Duggan who seems to have seen its latent potential for musical treatment.

We find Bing Crosby as a successful song-writer turned play-producer. His newest effort is a musical starring Jane Wyman, whom we find singing, dancing, and revealing a truly excellent pair of legs. This backstage stuff soon dissipates, as though the people involved had become aware that no new ground was as yet being broken,

and the story concentrates instead on the home life of Bing Crosby, widower and father of a girl in her early teens and a boy who has just reached the shaving age. Father has been so busy being successful that he hasn't had much time to spend on the problems of his kids. Little Barbara has her heart set on getting into a fancy private school run by Ethel Barrymore. Serious enough, but even more serious is the case of young Jerry, for the devil has gotten into his flesh and his heart has become set on Jane Wyman, a lady of thirty-five or so. She, in turn, has her heart set on Bing, who would like to achieve a rapprochement with his kids before matrimony again.

Another thing Jerry has his heart set on is being a big-time song writer. He plays a song of his own composition for Bing who, in a not particularly tactful manner, tells him that the song sounds like a thousand other routine efforts. No heart in it, no zing. Whereupon Bing sings a song that does have zing—in fact, I believe it's called "Zing"—and damned if I could tell which song was better. Jerry, not entirely daunted, and quite rightly so, eventually pours his heart into a song about Jane Wyman, and this one, all are bound to admit, truly has zing. Not that this makes Jerry particularly happy, for by now he has discovered that Miss Wyman has only motherly affection for him, while reserving the ardency of her nature for Bing. Barbara, by the way, gets into the fancy private school, after Bing has charmed Ethel Barrymore into a tizzy. This fooled me, because I kept thinking Barbara would wind up in a public school. Nor was I entirely satisfied by the wind-up, which has Jerry giving up his claims on Miss Wyman. Seems to me that trouble might eventually brew in the household for, with both Jerry and Bing getting older, sooner or later the advantage could go to the younger man.

I can't say that the concoction struck me as entirely pleasant, change from the usual formula though it does represent. We will then give Mr. Duggan E for the Effort to get out of a clearly discernible rut.

**T**HIS rut could hardly be better exemplified than by another Paramount musical called "Somebody Loves Me." Here we have that dreary pattern about some oldtime vaudeville stars who hoof and sing their way into the Palace and whatever glories are left after that. This one purports to be the musical biography of Blossom Seeley and Benny Fields; they are played, respectively, by Betty Hutton and Ralph Meeker. Miss Hutton behaves in an offensively strident way, and Mr. Meeker seems lost and

bewildered among the long series of clichés.

Both of the above productions somehow manage to make all the more clear the relatively enduring qualities of "The Merry Widow," with its Lehar score that, by now, is encrusted with nostalgia for a multitude of people. For its fourth Hollywood turn M-G-M has mounted a slightly wondrous production—settings prettier than a picture postcard, sumptuous rooms, huge marble staircases, and chandeliered ballrooms. Lana Turner makes a fetching widow, especially in the underwear designed for her, and Fernando Lamas, as Count Danilo of the tiny kingdom of Marshovia, dashes around energetically in his efforts to appear dashing. I must confess I didn't mind either of them, for they seemed to be enjoying themselves. Neither has a voice of any stature whatsoever, but the music sounded pleasant nevertheless. There are times when the froth doesn't rise very high and the champagne seems flat, but there are some good comic moments provided by Richard Haydn, who ought to be given a lot more work, and by John Abbott. I also enjoyed Una Merkel, whom I haven't seen for some time. The dances by Jack Cole are effective, as this sort of thing goes. I was startled occasionally by the English translations of the lyrics. "I'm going to Maxim's," I think I heard, "to squander my centimes." Ah, Hollywood!

—HOLLIS ALPERT.

## SR Recommends

*O. Henry's Full House:* A quintet of O. Henry stories generally well translated to the film medium. (SR Sept. 13.)

*Beauty and the Devil:* The Faust legend imbued by René Clair with his unique kind of frolic. (SR Sept. 13.)

*You for Me:* The Golden Rule takes a beating in a minor but entertaining comedy. (SR Aug. 30.)

*The Quiet Man:* John Ford goes back to the Old Sod to discover the loves and sports of Irishmen. (SR Aug. 23.)

*The Big Sky:* An engrossing and highly scenic screen adaptation of A. B. Guthrie Jr.'s novel. (SR Aug. 16.)

*Son of Paleface:* Bob Hope in a "wild man" film reminiscent of Keaton and Lloyd. (SR Aug. 9.)

*Ivanhoe:* A somewhat denatured but still splendid mounting of Scott's Norman-Saxon classic. (SR Aug. 2.)

*Carrie:* An absorbing match with Laurence Olivier's talent combatting his lack of verisimilitude in Dreiser's part. (SR July 12.)

*High Noon:* A very superior Western crowded with atmosphere and foreboding. (SR July 5.)

*Under the Paris Sky:* Some "snatch-of-life" episodes welded by Duvivier into a pictorially vivid apotheosis of Paris. (SR May 24.)

*Outcast of the Islands:* Conrad's early novel transformed by Carol Reed into a film with a full quota of authentic atmosphere. (SR Apr. 26.)

# TV and Radio

## GROUCHO MARX VS. THE PEOPLE

I thought I might regale you with a few intimate stories about a man whom I affectionately call my friend, presently occupied in the rather opprobrious business of operating a quiz show on radio and television. These few vignettes may help clear up for you, as they did long ago for me, the reason his quiz program is so far ahead of the others. I refer, of course, to Groucho Marx and "You Bet Your Life."

A mild-mannered, soft- but often-spoken man, Groucho is enchanted by people, not so much by people *per se*, but rather for the dialogue he is able to draw from them by a special off-beat type of kindly questioning both on and off the mediums in which he works. These stories take place off the mediums.

I'll skip the mad compulsions which drive him to sudden conversation with people—as for instance that day we walked past St. Patrick's on Fifth Avenue, where a small wedding was taking place, and as the bride passed us Groucho softly tapped her on the shoulder and said, "I tried it twice, it's no good." I'll never forget the utter confusion behind that veil as she went in trying to recall which relative he was. She knew she had seen him somewhere.

It's in the New York shops where Groucho has his field day. On the streets he is recognized, since he looks exactly as he does on the TV screens. But when he approaches salespeople with sudden questions they seem to be thrown into such a first-degree state of frenzy trying to come up with sudden answers that they doubt their sanity, which tells them that this is Groucho Marx.

We went into a haberdashery shop in a building where there was a sign: "Arthur Murray Dance School." The eager salesman came toward us and Groucho quietly asked, "Where are the girls?" The salesman pulled up short.

"Girls?"

"Yes, the Arthur Murray Girls."

"Oh—that's upstairs."

Groucho looked apologetic.

"They don't open till noon," the salesman continued.

Groucho looked crushed. I said I'd like to see a tie and we went to the ties. Groucho wandered off and was soon seen in a far corner of the shop holding up the most vicious red plaid shirt I'd ever seen.

"That's a very nice shirt," the salesman called over.

"Is it pure wool?" Groucho asked. "I sweat a lot when I dance."

There followed a long discourse about all the Arthur Murray girls Groucho said he had danced with in his life, and the salesman confided that he once knew a dancing girl, and we were off.

In front of Saks Fifth Avenue stood a barker announcing the bus for Chinatown leaving in ten minutes.

"How much?" asked Groucho.

"Dollar and a half," the barker replied. "Leaves in ten minutes."

"That's a lot of money," said Groucho. "Do they have real Chinese down there now? I hear they get a lot of men and make 'em up to look like Chinese."

"Oh no," said the barker, "there are more Chinese now than ever. Since the war."

"Which war was that?" Groucho wanted to know.

The man shifted his argument. "Bus leaves in five minutes. Better hurry. How about it?"

"Well, we'll sleep on it," said Groucho and we went into Saks, where a man was trying on a pair of shoes, while his wife, a bejeweled, beminked dowager stood by holding a dog.

"How much for the dog, Miss?" asked Groucho.

This took some explaining ("This dog is not for sale") and some apologizing ("Excuse me, I thought you were a salesgirl") followed by some long dialogue about breeding in humans as well as in animals.

NEXT it was an art shop, where it seems on an earlier visit Groucho had toyed with the idea of buying a painting. The nice little old Frenchman recalled Groucho vaguely and then Groucho introduced me.

"This is Mr. Zimmerman," he said pointing to me. "He's from the tax department. Now tell him what you told me how I could buy this painting and beat the Government out of the money by deducting it from my income tax."

Groucho subsequently bought the painting. The price was exorbitant, but I'm sure it helped pay for the little man's nervous breakdown.

At home in Beverly Hills Groucho leads a more sedentary, but still ridiculous, life. I'll tell you about it next time.

—GOODMAN ACE.