



## No Argument with Success

"I'M STILL trying to find someone to agree with me about *My Fair Lady*," a friend who had seen the film said, glancing at me hopefully, as though I might be able to sustain him in his uninfluenced, uncorrupted opinion that the movie was not all *that* good. The newspaper reviews in New York, on its opening, were a barrage of raves, and to certain sophisticated moviegoers that in itself can be grounds for suspicion. For these people I can't be of any help at all. I thought the movie was fine, I enjoyed it hugely, and whatever critical caution I brought with me was soon lulled into extinction by the stylish, witty, elegantly entertaining show, bigger and much more handsome than life, accomplished in all its elements.

I'll admit that I was a bit dubious at first when I heard that Jack L. Warner was personally producing the movie, mainly because I didn't know much about his qualifications for such a job, but he seems to have limited himself largely to supplying the lavish amounts of money needed to bring it to the screen. I'll admit, also, to having my doubts about the wisdom of employing Audrey Hepburn as Eliza Doolittle, when the incomparable Julie Andrews was willing, ready, and available. But the finished product reveals that Miss Hepburn was able to rise brilliantly to the occasion in what could have been

her most critical three hours. And credit should at once be given for a rare stroke of casting genius when Rex Harrison was chosen, instead of Tony Curtis or Rock Hudson, for the Professor Higgins role.

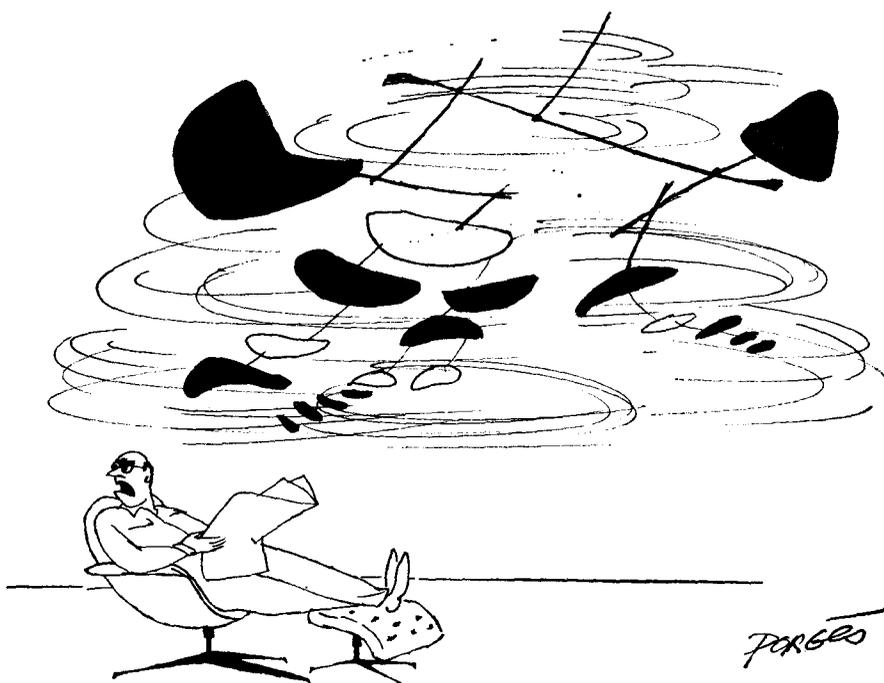
Guided surely, expertly, and tastefully by director George Cukor, these two principals turn in bravura performances. Harrison bellows and crackles in the truest Shavian manner, his spoken-singing is a delight, and the large screen reveals some pleasurable nuances that were not always discernible on the stage. Miss Hepburn, looking slightly scrawny but lovely nevertheless, ranges unexpectedly from the raucous to the delicate. She is anguished and regal, laugh-provoking and throat-catching in a role that seemingly can stand differing styles of interpretation. She even appears to be belting out her songs, although our mind does inform us that it can't be, that it is Mamie Nixon, Hollywood's most unsung singer, who is being used for what is politely termed augmentation. This is to say that Miss Hepburn may begin a song on a note she can handle, but it is Miss Nixon who finishes.

Problems of esthetics may well be involved here, but they are complex problems, and if we are going to argue about the propriety of dubbing in Miss Nixon's singing voice for Miss Hepburn's, then we also ought to take up the matter of some unknown Italian actress supplying the voice for the won-

derful Jean Moreau in Antonioni's *La Notte*. I remember hearing no complaints at that time. I'm inclined to view it, where Hollywood musicals are concerned, as one of the facts of movie life and to allow the theorists to work it all out, but only as long as I am having a good time. When the practice becomes jarring or obtrusive we may then righteously complain. Here there is very little sense of jar, at least for my relatively untrained ears, and for this the Warner sound department deserves much credit. Both Stanley Holloway, as Doolittle, and Mr. Harrison have tricky numbers to perform, but Harrison does his "live" with the aid of a little microphone hidden in his tie, while Holloway records his in the traditional playback technique. Without being told, we wouldn't have known the difference.

In redoing the musical for the screen, Cukor was obviously in no mood to argue with success, for the Cecil Beaton costumes have been carried out much as on the stage, the difference being that more attention has been paid to the working out of each fine detail and more magnificence was made possible. Realism, too, was possible for the film, but this Cukor has eschewed, wisely building Covent Garden rather than going to the grubby original, and even running race horses through a sound stage instead of redressing Santa Anita or mounting an expedition to Ascot. Thus we stay in the format of the show, and proponents of the *auteur* theory of film direction will have some explaining to do when they tell us this is a Cukor film, instead of one conceived by Lerner and Loewe from what the title credits inform us is "a play by George Bernard Shaw." And if *My Fair Lady* is not exactly an example of "pure cinema," it moves along with no discernible grinding of gears, free of intrusive directorial effects. Cukor is not only capable; he is a modest man. He has modestly allowed each of his players to turn in ebullient, top-notch performances, seen to it that they are photographed winningly and warmly, made sure that the musical and dance elements blend appropriately. Stanley Holloway is back as Doolittle, Wilfred Hyde-White, Theodore Bikel, and Gladys Cooper have been added, and the whole show blazes brightly in the finest of color. There's only one thing to do about it: line up and buy tickets.

CURRENTLY playing in two New York theaters is a premeditated double feature called *The Anatomy of a Marriage*, designed to be seen more or less back to back, although each is a complete feature in itself. One ticket buys the two shows. Aside from the gimmicky method of presentation, something new in film exhibition, Andre Cayette has achieved a veritable tour de force. One

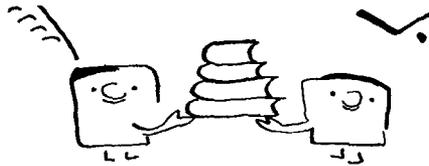


"Shut that door!"

of the films is called *My Days with Jean-Marc*; the other is titled *My Nights With Françoise*. It doesn't particularly matter which is viewed first, but it does matter if both are *not* viewed. For, seen separately, each film seems a not too unusual, even routine story of the failure of a marriage.

In *My Nights with Françoise* the events of the marriage are viewed from the husband's angle. He sees himself as selfless, devoted to his wife, daughter, and a career of high principle. His wife, on the other hand, soon loses interest in sustaining the marriage, loses herself in her work, appears to be flagrantly unfaithful, and eventually wears out her faithful spouse's patience. In *My Days with Jean-Marc* we get the wife's point of view. At first hesitant about forsaking her brains and talent for the role of a typical housewife, she then devotes herself to her clod of a husband, sees to it that he gets opportunities for advancement, and valiantly resists the seductive efforts of several attractive men. Even so, her marriage gives way before the pettishness, suspicion, and jealousy of her husband.

Neither film would be in the least important without the other. But when seen in tandem a surprising thing occurs. Suddenly the story takes on significance, as an event viewed from one partner's vantage point carries a different



meaning when seen from the other's. And what eventually emerges is not the "truth" of a particular happening, but a story of two people unable to communicate with each other because each is wrapped in an emotional blanket made up of self-love, self-pity, and self-justification. The trouble with the experiment is that each film doesn't sustain itself for its full length, and, oddly, it is the second film that gathers more interest, mainly because of the support of the first. Jacques Charrier is the husband, Marie-Jose Nat the wife. Since the latter has considerable acting ability and the former does not, it is her story that tends to have more credulity. But her very excellence, when unsupported by an equally strong performance by Charrier, has a weakening effect on the *raison d'être* of the experiment. Here, though, is certainly a novelty, and it is rather a pity that it is all done so slickly. We don't really learn much about a marriage, and what we do learn takes a total of three hours and twenty minutes of our time. Even for making a valid point, that's a long time.

—HOLLIS ALPERT.

## Communication and Art

SAN FRANCISCO.

ONE MEASURE of the stature of any film festival is the number and variety of satellite events, quite apart from cocktail parties and late-night banquets, that surround the screenings of feature pictures, which are always the main attraction. In New York earlier this fall, it was a conference organized by the American Council on Education devoted to the problems of teaching film appreciation in the colleges that lent a lasting significance to the Lincoln Center festival. At San Francisco's Eighth Annual Film Festival, just concluded, it was two series of special screenings organized under the titles "Film as Communication" and "Film as Art." Although both have been going on for several years, for the first time they were administered as separate entities—an indication of the importance they have assumed. "Film as Communication" ran for two days, and offered in competition twenty-two pictures in seven categories that were winnowed by pre-screening committees from a field of almost 400. "Film as Art" presented twenty-one shorts selected from over 100 entries. Both were international in scope although, perhaps in-

evitably, the majority of titles came from the United States.

What impressed one immediately was the range of the film medium. There were pictures for elementary teaching and for advanced medical research, pictures that advised against smoking and that spoke for civil liberties. One recreated the golden age of Greece. Other pictures treated such subjects as how the Japanese protect their coastline from the incursions of sand, how the British ventilate their mines, and how Lewis Mumford imagines the city of the future.

"Film as Art" was almost as varied. A number of the entrants read the title correctly and submitted pictures that were, in themselves, art entities. But some used art to tell a story, and some were about art, and some few were clearly communications films that happened to be particularly well done and hence were artistic.

The hard-working pre-screening committees are not to be blamed for the resultant confusion. Film is a resilient medium that refuses to conform to any hardening of the categories. And what almost three days of incessant viewing of films as communication and films as art made abundantly clear is that, in or-

der to communicate, an instructional or motivational picture must be artistically done; while a film as art—which means essentially film as a means of personal expression—if made artistically, cannot fail but to communicate *something*.

What is meant by artistic, of course, is the proper use of the medium itself, of the camera, editing, and sound track. The Mumford film, *The City and the Future*, for example, failed to communicate because the quick and often fascinating glimpses of the well-planned city of tomorrow were invariably smothered under the incessant flow of Mumford's complex prose style. He may be eminently readable, but the ear soon loses the train of his thought—particularly when the eye is being stimulated simultaneously. Similarly, Chet Huntley, narrating what might have been an invaluable account of the need for fresh approaches to school construction, buried not only the visuals but ultimately the very point that he was trying to make under a deluge of statistics that could be properly assessed only on the printed page.

Other film-makers were simply over-anxious. *College with a Cause*, produced for the Lutheran Concordia Teachers College, seemed to have at least three starts and four endings in its attempt to appeal to as broad a segment of candidates as possible. *New England Sea Community*, which visually afforded a clean and straightforward account of the life a mid-nineteenth-century boy might expect to live in a small fishing village, dissipated its effect by attempting to disguise the commentary in a pseudo-folksong. *A Quarter Million Teenagers*, dealing factually with the high incidence of venereal diseases in American youth today, decorated its sober message with animations as bright and gaily textured as anything that ever came from the UPA studios. And *Tomorrow Today*, otherwise an illuminating film on the growing industrialization of Latin America, ultimately lost its audience through repeated plugs for the sponsor's product.

On the other hand, one of the prizes at San Francisco went to *A Breath of Life*, which demonstrated clearly and without any frills whatsoever the techniques of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. A Golden Gate Award went to NBC's program on Greece, a model of clarity in writing and of beauty in visuals; and another of USIA's, *Nine from Little Rock*, a genuinely moving and dramatic survey of what has become of the nine Negro youths who entered Little Rock High School in the fall of 1957 in defiance of Governor Faubus. Each of these film-makers, in his own way, faced his problem squarely and came up with simple, honest solutions. As a result, their pictures have integrity—and art.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.