

Gregory Peck season

Spellbound

“Not to be speechless about it, David O. Selznick has a rare film in *Spellbound*.”

Notes compiled by Ewan Birse



A contemporary review -

This writer has had little traffic with practitioners of psychiatry or with the twilight abstractions of their science, so we are no in a position to say whether Ingrid Bergman, who plays one in her latest film, "Spellbound," is typical of such professionals or whether the methods she employs would yield results. But this we can say with due authority: if all psychiatrists are as fruitful as hers are to Gregory Peck, who plays a victim of amnesia in this fine film which came to the Astor yesterday -- then psychiatry deserves such popularity as this picture most certainly will enjoy.

For Miss Bergman and her brand of treatment, so beautifully demonstrated here, is a guaranteed cure for what ails you, just as much as it is for Mr. Peck. It consists of her winning personality, softly but insistently suffused throughout a story of deep emotional content of her ardent sincerity, her

lustrous looks and her easy ability to toss off glibly a line of talk upon which most girls would choke.

In other words, lovely Miss Bergman is both the doctor and prescription in this film. She is the single stimulation of dramatic logic and audience belief. For the fact is the story of "Spellbound" is a rather obvious and often-told tale. And it depends, despite its truly expert telling, upon the illusion of the lady in the leading role.

It is the story of a female psychiatrist who falls suddenly and desperately in love with a man

upon whom the dark suspicion of murder is relentlessly cast. All of the circumstantial evidence indicates that he has taken the dead man's place and is trying to assume his position -- that is, until he prudently leaves. But the lady, with full and touching confidence in the intuitive rightness of her love, is convinced that her adored one is most truly a victim of amnesia. And so she follows him to his place in hiding, begins the bold attempt to unlock his mind and, always two jumps ahead of detectives, finally delves the gnawing secret of his past.

This story, we say, has relation to all the faith-healing films ever made, but the manner and quality of its telling is extraordinarily fine. The script, which was based on the novel of Francis Beeding, "The House of Dr. Edwardes," was prepared by Ben Hecht and the director was Alfred Hitchcock, the old master of dramatic suspense. So the firm texture of the narration, the flow of continuity and dialogue, the shock of the unexpected, the scope of image -- all are happily here.

But, in this particular instance, Mr. Hecht and Mr. Hitchcock have done more. They have fashioned a moving love story with the elements of melodramatic use. More than a literal "chase" takes place here -- more than a run from the police. A "chase" of even more suspenseful moment is made through the mind of a man. And in this strange and

Eden Court Cinema

Tuesday 24 June 2014 at 7.15pm

1945, USA, B&W

Running time: 109 mins.

Genre: Psychological thriller

Language: English

Cast: Ingrid Bergman, Gregory Peck, Michael Chekhov, Leo G Carroll, Rhonda Fleming, John Emery

Director: Alfred Hitchcock

Screenplay: Ben Hecht, Angus MacPhail, from the novel 'The House of Dr. Edwardes' by Francis Beeding



indeterminate area the pursuer -- and, partially, the pursued -- is the girl with whom the victim is mutually in love. Mr. Hitchcock has used some startling images to symbolize the content of dreams -- images designed by Salvador Dali. But his real success is in creating the illusion of love.

Miss Bergman, as we say, is his chief asset in accomplishing the sincerity of this film, but Mr. Peck is also a large contributor. His performance, restrained and refined, is precisely the proper counter to Miss Bergman's exquisite role. Michael Chekhov is likewise responsible for some of the excellent humor in this film, playing an elderly psychiatrist and an accomplice in Miss Bergman's mental "chase." Leo G. Carroll, Wallace Ford and John Emery contribute excellent smaller roles.

Not to be speechless about it, David O. Selznick has a rare film in "Spellbound."

Bosley Crowther. The New York Times.

...and a more recent one -

"Spellbound" is perhaps the earliest Alfred Hitchcock film that I identify with the director. It also has his signature feel which includes innovative camerawork and effects, along with a story that includes a high degree of danger.

Ingrid Bergman plays a doctor at a psychiatric hospital who is introduced to a new doctor, played by Gregory Peck. However, once he starts showing signs of emotional instability, she discovers he may not be who he says he is. This leads the two of them on a mystery to discover his past and a possible murder he might have committed.

Even though this film is steeped in the 40s in terms of style and delivery, it stands out with several things. The most notable is the use of surrealism for a dream sequence that was designed by Salvador Dali. Even by today's standards, this dream sequence is integral to the plot and quite innovative. It's not just thrown in to show emotional distress. It is necessary to solve the mystery.

There's also some neat cinematic elements that Hitchcock uses, including point-of-view shooting. Made in an age when master shots often became a standard scene style, Hitchcock shows some real thought behind his composition.

Even though its two-hour running time seems a bit long, some of this is taken up with the overture and exit music. The movie is quite brisk and smooth. The presence of both Bergman and Peck shows the two as true movie stars of the Golden Age of cinema. They are surprisingly young and attractive, particularly Peck whom I know from later films. Both stars are able to portray their characters without getting wrapped up in the cheesy moments of 40s-era cinema, and their performances are still of high quality to this day.

Of course, I cannot talk about this film without tipping my hat to Mel Brooks, who used elements of it for his brilliant spoof "High Anxiety." To me, that makes these films practical companion pieces for the care with which the directors worked more than thirty years apart.

Kevin Carr. 7M Pictures

Our next screening...



To Kill a Mockingbird

Continuing our

Gregory Peck season

on Tuesday 8 July 2014 at 7.15pm

Based on Harper Lee's much loved Pulitzer prize winning novel and featuring Gregory Peck's Oscar winning performance as Alabama lawyer Atticus Finch in a story of racial prejudice, heroism and childhood innocence.

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www.invernessfilmfans.org



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