

LOVE ME TONIGHT is the LVCA May, 2013 dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library.

LOVE ME TONIGHT United States 1932 black-and-white live action musical
Paramount Publix Corp. 89 minutes

**** of a possible ***** 16 of a possible 20 points

Key: *indicates an outstanding performance or technical achievement

Songs: 1. "The Song of Paree"

2. "Isn't It Romantic?"

3. "Lover"*

4. "Mimi"

5. "A Woman Needs Something Like That"

6. "I'm An Apache"

7. "Love Me Tonight"

8. "The Son-of-a-Gun Is Nothing But A Tailor"

Points

Producer: Rouben Mamoulian

1 Director: Rouben Mamoulian

2 Editors: Rouben Mamoulian*, William Shea* (both uncredited)

2 Cinematographer: Victor Milner*

2 Lighting*

0 Screenplay: Samuel Hoffenstein; Waldemar Young; George Marion, Jr.
based on the play by Paul Armont and Leopold Marchand

2 Music: Richard Rodgers* and an uncredited John Leipold

Lyrics: Lorenzo Hart

2 Art Director: Hans Dreier* (uncredited)

2 Sound: M. M. Paggi* (uncredited)

1 Principal Cast: Maurice Chevalier (Maurice Courtelin / Baron Courtelin),
Jeanette MacDonald (Princess Jeanette),
Myrna Loy (Countess Valentine), Charlie Ruggles
(Gilbert Vicomte de Varese), Charles Butterworth* (Count de Savignac),
C. Aubrey Smith (Duke d'Artelines), Marion "Peanuts" Byron (Bakery Girl),

George “Gabby” Hayes (Grocer), Bert Roach (Emile), Rolfe Sedan (Taxi Driver), Tyler Brooke (Composer), Elizabeth Patterson (First Aunt), Ethel Griffies (Second Aunt), Blanche Frederici (Third Aunt), Robert Greig (Major Domo Flamand), Mary Doran (Madame Dupont, seamstress), Joseph Cawthorne (Dr. Armand de Pontignac)

2 Creativity

16 total points

LOVE ME TONIGHT was the second film music score composed by Richard Rodgers and the first successful one. It gave the world a classic ballad titled “Lover” and is otherwise mainly remarkable for the inventive interplay of sound, lighting, music, cinematography, editing and set decoration. Lyrics by Lorenzo Hart are lost amid indistinct thick French accents of Maurice Chevalier and trilling vibratos of soprano costar Jeanette MacDonald. More lucid and lasting are the percussive underpinnings of action sequences, usually starting slowly in soft tones and then accelerating into dynamic prestos of clamor. Riddled with humorous visual jokes and inversions of customary tempos, this musical experiment remains engrossingly droll.

Opening the film is a crescendo of percussive noises relating to awakening laborers and vendors in the streets of a reconstructed Paris. Hans Dreier’s uncredited efforts to present a credible simulation of the bustling boulevards of the city of light pay off handsomely. Later on he scores an additional triumph with elegantly spacious halls and grandiose towering glass doors of the Duke D’Arteline’s country estate.

At the conclusion of LOVE ME TONIGHT’S first musical number, a prying camera zooms into the apartment of sporty, self-appointed municipal rake Maurice Courtelin. Devoid of any ethic of social responsibility, this playboy protagonist introduces a raffish credo through a throaty, frequently off-pitch, half sprechstimme rendition of “The Song of Patee,” annihilating the composer’s lyrical intention with self-promoting gusto. Courtelin rapidly completes dressing, descends to the busy street below and accosts various vendors and passers-by with greetings ranging from unabashedly trite to downright nosy. If obnoxiously bon-vivant Chevalier seems uningratiating, audiences can simultaneously feast

their eyes on richly detailed window displays created by A. E. Freudeman who, like so many other artisans who contributed to this film, was left devoid of any formal credit.

When Maurice reaches his destination, he sheds leisure wear, replacing it with the fitted suit of a professional tailor. There is childish pride in aristocratic connections evidenced in a confession to plump, stylish Emile, first visitor to Courtelin's shop, that business depends overwhelmingly upon the patronage of Gilbert, Vicomte de Vazeze. Hardly has that name been mentioned than its bearer appears, distraught in underwear and pretending to be a marathon runner. All of which follows from being driven hastily out of the home of a cuckolded husband and, presumably, abandoning wallet as well as trousers. Emile affably vacates a dressing room for Monsieur Adulterer's expeditious outfitting, even though no thanks or money are offered as compensation. Whenever the topic of cash is broached, it elicits merely a promise to obtain what is owed from Gilbert's wealthy uncle. Who happens to be a titled duke. How fortunate, since Maurice has persuaded fellow tradesmen to aid in outfitting the Vicomte.

After their unexpected visitor departs a delegation of creditors enters. When will the Vicomte's substantial bills be paid? Masking personal frustration, the shop's owner gives assurance compensation will come shortly. Then a stranger arrives with unsettling news: no retailer in town should accept orders from the Vicomte de Vazeze. That shameless individual never pays what is due.

What a shock. Think of that. A nobleman declining to fulfill obligations to commoners in Ruritania. Unheard of. Well, not really. Should the police and judiciary be approached for assistance? Why create a courtroom drama? Better to send someone stubbornly to decamp on the duke's doorstep until his nephew pays up. Maurice cheerfully volunteers. For no evident reason, this produces a ditty called "Isn't It Romantic?" which begins in the throat of the haberdasher and is taken up by a passing cabbie whose fare chances to be a composer. Quick cut to the musician aboard a train, warbling the catchy tune as a cluster of troops listen and then repeat it. Another rapid edit reveals soldiers tramping along a road perversely singing "Isn't It Romantic?" under hearty urging of a cheerful officer. A deserter from their ranks detaches himself and races off into the woods with a violin, rather than a gun. Arriving at a gypsy camp, the violinist entertains the

inhabitants with a lively rendition of the tune he heard as a marching song. Finally, its notes are heard by the princess Jeanette in her residence at the duke's chateau, which will soon be Maurice's destination. So two completely mismatched individuals are joined together by a common tune, foreshadowing their imminent meeting when the playboy journeys to the Duke's chateau.

Similar weavings occur throughout the film, as when a train's propulsive rhythm is counterpointed with a horse ride gradually accelerating in tempo and noise until the supernaturally vigorous equine overtakes its mechanical competitor, reversing the history of travel.

Despite wonderful visual and aural novelties, the film is saddled with conventional romantic closeups and a creaky plot derived, according to Benoit Racine's IMDB review, from a stage play titled "The Tailor and the Princess." Its conclusion is predictable, but much less so its juxtapositions of characters and environments. During the hunt sequence, viewers are treated to the spectacle of a stag bounding across streams and meadows with a pronounced bunny hop. Growing tired, it is brought into a lodge for refreshment by Maurice, who has assumed the identity of an incognito royal conservationist. Chastising the princess and his noble hosts for insensitivity, "Baron" Courtelin counsels withdrawal. Let the deer sleep in peace after its meal which he so generously provided from their larder. On the screen, retreat of the hunters is depicted in reverse slow motion as they languorously retrace earlier gallops back to the stables. Later on, three elderly unmarried aunts of the princess spread exciting news that the "Baron" has offended a haughty dressmaker by dashing through the manor yipping like hunt dogs in pursuit of prey. Elsewhere a slow motion game of bridge is set to a draggy arrangement of "There'll Be A Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight." And when the film's protagonist first reaches the Princess's domicile and searches vainly for occupants, his wanderings begin leisurely and accelerate into mad dashes up flights of stairs set to the tune of "Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here."

Enough of the film's highlights. There are serious deficiencies of which potential screeners should be aware. First, the shrill vibrato of Jeanette MacDonald is neither pleasant nor comfortable to hear. It demolishes Richard Rodgers' exquisite classic "Lover," which is easily the best-crafted and most memorable piece of music utilized in the movie. Myrna Loy is miscast as a bored

seductress with too much money and time on her hands. She is given fitting Mary Astor caustic lines, but lacks steely eyes and cynical vocal tone needed to deliver them authoritatively. Diagonal superimpositions of images during the “Love Me Tonight” number emphasize the visual at the expense of the auditory, diminishing the pleasure of hearing the song itself. Several scenes are blatantly sexist, intended to showcase MacDonald’s physique on the assumption that her singing graces are inadequate alone. Many lines of dialogue and lyrics are lost through slurry phrasings of Chevalier and stratospheric pipings of his romantic partner.

Considerable commendation is due, on the other hand, to many of the technical crew. Often they labored anonymously, but not in vain. Without elegant costumes from Edith Head, majestic architectural designs of Hans Dreier, and atypically dynamic editing by the uncredited duo of Rouben Mamoulian and William Shea, this picture would not seem exceptional. Mamoulian’s direction elicits very little passion from the players, though the restrained Keatonesque performance of Charles Butterworth as feckless Count de Savignac is blessedly uninflected and winningly droll. Victor Milner’s inspired cinematography is reinforced by tremendous clarity of lighting, creating an airy, nearly ethereal texture which elevates some comedy scenes far above any romantic interludes. Too often the latter are subverted by misguided contradictions which can be ironically stinging under the direction of a Lubitsch or Wilder, but fall fatally flat when employed by an expressionistically inclined Mamoulian.

Harder to judge is Richard Rodgers’ music. Many numbers work well as percussive exercises in form. And he is delightfully creative in providing tonal accompaniment to the deer hunt. There’s plenty of potency in his setting of the train chase. Furthermore, Rodgers created a masterpiece of melody with “Lover”, though MacDonald is definitely not the ideal singer to illustrate its graces. Worse, the master of cinematic waltzes is compelled to convert one into a languid minuet at one point. Yet there is a redemption in the thrilling whispering chorus which comically communicates gossip’s corrosive nature.

Superior sound recording and editing partner vibrantly with the score throughout the length of this somewhat dated fantasy. An uncredited M. M. Paggi deserves praise for impressive mastery of sound recording, especially considering how primitive available sound recording mechanisms were in 1932.

Extras on the Kino dvd release include an enlightening audio commentary by Miles Kreuger, founder and President of the Institute of the American Musical Inc., screenplay excerpts detailing contents of deleted scenes, vital documentation of production and censorship issues, a photo gallery, promotional materials, a historical booklet essay by Miles Kreuger placing the film in historical, cultural and cinematic contexts, Maurice Chevalier singing “Louise,” Jeanette MacDonald singing “Love Me Tonight” and the original theatrical trailer used to promote LOVE ME TONIGHT.

LOVE ME TONIGHT was elected to the National Film Registry as an American cultural treasure in 1990 and will therefore be preserved in the Library of Congress.

Mamoulian’s best musical is racy, inventive, antiquated, charming, silly, fantastic, unconvincing, energetic and a milestone of American cinema. It should be seen by every viewer interested in the development of the American musical, provided that viewer has at least reached the teen years of age. Not recommended for preteens due to its amorality.