



TROUBLE IN PARADISE is a belated 2018 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library. Below is Kino Ken's review of that Criterion dvd release.

8 of a possible 20 points

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United States / France 1932 black-and-white 82 minutes live action feature comedy Paramount Publix Corporation

Producer: Ernst Lubitsch

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

Points:

- 0 Direction: Ernst Lubitsch**
- 1 Editing: Ernst Lubitsch? (uncredited)**
- 2 Cinematographer: Victor Milner**
Still Photographers: Earl Crowley, Eugene Richee
- 0 Lighting**
- 1 Screenplay: Samson Raphaelson from the play *A Becsületes Megtaláló (The Honest Finder)* by Aladár László**
Adaptation: Grover Jones
- 1 Music: W. Franke Harling Lyrics: Leo Robin**
- 2 Production Design: Hans Dreier***
- 1 Sound: M. M. Poggi**
- 0 Acting**
- 0 Creativity**

8 total points

Cast: Herbert Marshall (Gaston Monescu), Miriam Hopkins (Lily Vautier), Kay Francis (Mariette Colet) Charlie Ruggles (Major), Edward Everett Horton (François Filaba), C. Aubrey Smith (Adolph Giron), Robert Grieg (Jacques the Butler), Luis Alberni (Annoyed Opera Fan), Hooper Atchley (Insurance Agent), Tyler Brooke a.k.a. Victor Hugo de Biere (Commercial Singer), Marion Byron (Maid), Louise Carter (Woman With Wrong Handbag), Gino Corrado (Venetian Singer / Garbageman), George Humbert (Venetian Waiter), Perry Ivins (Radio Commentator), Leonid Kinskey (Russian Visitor), Gus Leonard (Elderly Servant), Carl Leviness (Party Guest), Fred Malatesta (Hotel Manager), Eva Mckenzie (Duchess Chambreau), Hector Sarno (Prefect of Police), Rolfe Sedan (Purse Salesman), Larry Steers (Party Guest), Frederick Sullivan (Operagoer On Mezzanine), Nella Walker (Madame Bouchet)

Here's a surviving piece of fluff from the early 1930s by the hugely overrated director Ernst Lubitsch, who once upon a time had a reputation for making sprightly sophisticated comedies and trailblazing musicals. TROUBLE IN PARADISE certainly isn't one of them. A barebones, contrarian screenplay absent anything remotely discernible as character development relates utterly unbelievable larcenous adventures of two unmarried pickpockets. Though by rights such human zeros richly deserve permanent bonding to each other, they are only intermittently coupled by a largely humorless screenplay by Lubitsch and writing partner Samson Raphaelson. Permeated by icy amorality, the tale told is as charmingly witty as a sledgehammer battering down a cardboard dollhouse.

This stodgy, often overacted misfire of a romance begins amid physical garbage in Venice and concludes in an ethical gutter with the

featured pair of crooks still traveling unchecked around Europe on stolen money.

A mid-story stop in Paris refills depleted coffers and nearly sidetracks the twosome's male half, who develops an obsession for an heiress. Or perhaps merely for her cash and jewelry assets. Which truly draws his interest? Lubitsch assumes the answer to be irrelevant, more concerned as usual with style than substance.

As Gaston Monescu, a purportedly renowned Romanian thief, Herbert Marshall is stiffly inappropriate, exuding neither charm nor grace. Indeed, he appears to be suffering from a possibly lethal migraine. His love interest the first is American Lily Vautier, whose fake surname suggests French origins. Played by eternally hammy Miriam Hopkins – whose true *métier* was Broadway, not the cinema— Lily swoons and drawls her way through a series of wardrobe variations the purpose of which must have been to hide underlying detachment of personality from performance.

Predictably, Gaston soon devotes amorous attentiveness to Mariette Colet, who, in the semblance of Kay Francis, actually could be capable of returning them without resorting to amateur theatrics.

With both leads phony as carnival barkers and not clever enough to realize it, a supporting cast of stereotypes dredged from some bargain basement of opera buffo discards gets inserted for diversion. There's no real reason for their appearance at all, except to distract viewers from the irritatingly smarmy leads lying their way into unmerited prosperity while smugly asserting ethical superiority over hypocritical opponents.

Cinematographer Victor Milner excelled in lensing giddy, waltzing aristocrats behaving foolishly amid imposing, ornate settings. Here he joins forces effectively with production designer Hans Dreier to create

an ambience of Art Deco elegance that a Swiss cheese screenplay left completely unrealized.

When music is heard Lubitsch keeps it discreetly in the background so as not to interfere with senseless jabberings of walking absurdities.

Sound recording for this trivia is significantly unnatural, adding perhaps unintentionally to artificiality. Despite being in the vanguard of sound experimentation, Lubitsch fails to make a smooth transition from the fantasy of musical comedy to drawing-room bantering a la Coward and Shaw, causing his material to fall flat. There's nothing provided either verbally or visually to compensate viewers for emotional investment in plot or characters. Dated even when first released, *TROUBLE IN PARADISE* now seems an anachronistic escapee from the heyday of silent melodrama's exaggeratedly broad gestures and unrealistic plotting.

By no means can an impartial critic recommend it, except for masochistic film historians desirous of screening every possible remnant of Lubitsch's oeuvre. *TROUBLE IN PARADISE* is too racy for preteens, boringly vapid for adolescents. Adults are likely to wonder why the picture's lackluster contents generated so much censure.

A box-office smash in 1932, Lubitsch's favorite creation became the sixth highest-grossing release at the box office that year. It soon was judged indecent, then relegated by studio executives to archival status, from which it didn't emerge until American cinema experienced liberation from a Production Code straitjacket in the 1960s.

Today, as if lost treasure recovered, this unremarkable movie receives the advantages of a Criterion dvd release, unfortunately occupying space better devoted to neglected gems such as *NAVAJO*, *NAZARIN*, *SIXTEEN IN WEBSTER GROVES*, *DEVI*, *THE ICICLE THIEF*,

THE BISCUIT EATER (1940 original), THE BOYS FROM PAUL STREET, and LATCHO DROM, to name but a few.

Bonus features of Criterion's dvd release include a hilarious 1940 Screen Guild Theater radio program with a cast consisting of Ernst Lubitsch, Jack Benny, Claudette Colbert, and Basil Rathbone, all in prime form, an effusive audio commentary by Lubitsch biographer Scott Eyman, and Lubitsch's wretched short silent film misleadingly titled DAS FIDELE GEFÄNGNIS (THE MERRY JAIL), a forty-five minute bore about as jolly as a trip to the dentist with aching tooth. Other extras are an eleven-minute introduction to Lubitsch and his change-of-pace TROUBLE IN PARADISE, and tributes (some reverent, others bizarre) by peers and later filmmakers influenced by what has come to be known as the "Lubitsch touch," ostensibly seen and heard to fullest advantage in this 1932 public offering.