

TKAM Hollywood Reporter

Original Review

'TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD' RANKS WITH FINEST FILMS

Pakula-Mulligan Pic In Line for Honors

One of the finest pictures of this or any other year, "To Kill A Mockingbird" is certain also to be one of the best-loved. Produced with care by Alan J. Pakula and directed with true brilliance by Robert Mulligan, the Universal picture is a genuine experience, so penetrating and pervasive it lingers long after the last image has faded. There is no question it will be one of the year's most honored films. Funny, sad, exalting in its theme, "To Kill A Mockingbird" will require shrewd presentation, but given this, could be a solid commercial hit as well. It certainly deserves to be.

There are many "best-sellers," but there are few that anyone cares to remember. Harper Lee's novel, on which this film is based, created an extraordinary loyalty and personal championship among its readers. Horton Foote's screenplay captures all the charm, all the pathos, all the definitive characterizations, all the humor, and especially the aching grandeur of simple people—children and adults—facing the perplexities of life and meeting its challenges.

"To Kill A Mockingbird" is a memory of childhood, a creation of a child's world, of children viewing the adult world and their judgment on it. It is set in a slow-moving Alabama town of a generation ago. The principals are a respected attorney, Gregory Peck, and his two motherless children, played by Mary Badham and Phillip Alford. It begins with the children's world, its manufactured values and its made-up horrors and delightful titillations. It opens into the real world, the adult world, with its genuine and terrifying realities. Make-believe can be fled. Reality must be faced. The children begin to grow up. The dream of life is shattered by life as it is.

The framework of this theme is a trial to which Peck is assigned by the court. He is defense lawyer for a Negro accused of raping a white woman. His defense is not emotional. It is based on the law, its dignity and its importance. He fails. The man is convicted and is killed attempting to escape.

While this central incident dominates the story, it does not occupy the greatest time, and is actually only a smallish part of the whole story. There is a mentally-retarded adult who lives next door to the family, at first an object of unknowing childish teasing, later the realization of tenderness and love. There are scenes that put so much of life in sudden perspective. The children casually dispersing a lynch mob by their personalizing the members of the mob is one. The first day at school is another. The Negroes in the courtroom rising as Peck leaves, dejected, ostensibly, defeated, having lost his case, but having asserted his dignity and the dignity of all men. "To Kill A Mockingbird" is not an attack on the South for its failure to meet its problems. It is a Southern exposure of the tragedy these unresolved problems visit on all involved.

Mulligan's direction cannot be neglected. Peck gives probably the finest performance of his career, understated,

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD (Universal)

Producer Alan J. Pakula
Director Robert Mulligan
Screenplay Horton Foote
Based on the novel by Harper Lee
Photography Russell Harlan
Art direction Alexander Golitzen,
Henry Bumstead
Set decoration Oliver Emert
Music Elmer Bernstein
Sound Waldon O. Watson,
Corson Jowett
Film editor Aaron Stell
Assistant director Joseph Kenny
Asst. to producer Isabel Halliburton
Cast: Gregory Peck, Mary Badham,
Phillip Alford, John Megna, Frank
Overton, Rosemary Murphy, Ruth
White, Brock Peters, Estelle Evans,
Paul Fix, Collin Wilcox, James Ander-
son, Alice Ghostley, Robert Duvall,
William Windom, Crahan Denton,
Richard Hale, Kim Hamilton.
(Running time — 129 minutes)

casual, effective. The two children are nothing short of phenomenal. Untrained, they respond to direction like bright young animals, alert, sensitive, plastic. With the difference that they are human beings in whom intelligence glows and is fanned to flame by their extraordinary environment. Russell Harlan's low-key camera work must also be commended for catching these mercurial beings in their quick-silver emotional flittings.

The rest of the cast is also fine, playing with a realism that stimulates life without distorting it. John Megna, another wonderful child; Brock Peters, the stolid, terror-stricken defendant; Estelle Evans, the housekeeper-mother to the children; Frank Overton, Rosemary Murphy, Ruth White, Paul Fix, James Anderson, and especially Collin Wilcox, as the accuser of Peck's client, are among the vital assets of the cast. Others of value include Alice Ghostley, Robert Duval, William Windom, Crahan Denton, Richard Hale and Kim Hamilton.

Elmer Bernstein's gentle score, using the piano for nostalgic effect, is superb, letting the action speak, only underlining with tangent emotion. Art directors Alexander Golitzen and Henry Bumstead have literally re-created the southern town of the early 30's, assisted in detail by set decorator Oliver Emert. Aaron Stell's editing, carrying out the fluid design of director and cameraman, moves forward without apparent pace but inexorably. Sound, by Waldon O. Watson and Corson Jowett, is generally good, but the children are hard to understand in the early scenes. This may be part of the general plan, however, since it is a technical problem that the sound men could easily remedy.

"To Kill A Mockingbird" is a product of American realism, and it is a rare and worthy treasure.

— James Powers.

Play-Reading in Church

Marvin Miller and Lurene Tuttle next Sunday will do a concert reading from Charles Rann Kennedy's play, "The Terrible Meek," in St. James Episcopal Church, 3903 Wilshire Blvd., at both the 9:15 and 11 a.m. morning service. The unusual presentation is sponsored by Episcopal Theatre Guild.

'Requiem' Standout In L. A. Grosses

Although L.A. boxoffice grosses for the past week were very spotty, with business generally on the down side, a high spot was the \$100,000 take of Columbia's "Requiem for a Heavyweight," at 25 houses including Hawaii, \$3000; Orpheum, \$4800; Wiltern, \$4500; Picwood, \$3200; Loyola, \$3000. Other estimated takes:

"Manchurian Candidate," \$41,000, 16 theatres (5); "Music Man," \$30,000, El Rey, Village and seven other hard-tops (4); "What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?," \$2700, Iris (5); "Gigot," \$2000, Four Star (7); "Mutiny on the Bounty," \$26,000, Egyptian (3); "Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm," \$16,000, Stanley Warner Hollywood (17); "Gay Purr-ee," \$75,000, Hillstreet, Vogue, plus 21 other theatres (1); "Period of Adjustment," \$9500, Hollywood Paramount (4); "Longest Day," \$14,000, Carthay Circle (9); "Billy Budd," \$5500, Fox Wilshire (4); "Phaedra," \$6500, Fine Arts (4); "Divorce — Italian Style," \$3500, Lido (9); "West Side Story," \$15,000, Chinese (50); "Escape From East Berlin," \$41,000, Pix, State and 15 other houses (1); "Girls! Girls! Girls!," \$4800, Hollywood and Baldwin (3); "A Very Private Affair," \$2500, Stanley Warner Beverly (2); "Poor White Trash," \$5000, Los Angeles (2); "Coming Out Party," \$2500, Crest (4); "The Chapman Report," \$5000, Pantages (9).

Cathay Extends Co-Prod'n

Singapore. — The Cathay Organisation, which recently co-produced "Cast the Same Shadow" with Precitel of Paris, in French and English versions, has gone in for another co-production with a foreign film company. This one is a Cathay-Keris Studios of Singapore film in conjunction with Perfini Studios of Indonesia, and it's titled "Shadows at Dawn." Cathay's Hong Kong Studios also are producing several features with the Toho company of Japan.

'Wine & Roses' for DJ's

A screening of Warners' "Day of Wine and Roses" for some 300 radio-TV disc jockeys, record distributors and dealers will be held tomorrow night at Academy Award Theatre. Screening was coordinated by RCA Victor's new West Coast promotion chief, Stan Pat, to tie in with Henry Mancini's score and title tune for the picture.

Arresting Role

Virginia Whitmire, Shirley MacLaine's longtime stand-in, has been added to the cast of Billy Wilder's "Irma La Douce," Mirisch-Alperson presentation for UA release. She will play a police matron who puts Shirley in jail.

Singapore TV in March

Singapore. — The Minister of Culture, back from a visit to London to recruit staff for Singapore's new TV venture, said that Singapore should have TV before March next year. Equipment for the new station, from London and Tokyo, is on the way.