

Reel Reviews

By George Gerhard

We had permitted ourselves to become so enthused over the coming of "A Sainted Devil," Rudolph Valentino's latest feature for Famous Players, that we went to the Mark Strand yesterday with an unwonted zeal. But perhaps because of this very zeal, which had been inculcated by expert publicity, we had expected too much. At any rate, we were just a trifle disappointed.

The picture is a very good one, but we had expected a higher classification than very good. Of course, any picture which is enacted by Valentino, Nita Naldi, Helen D'Algy and Dagmar Godowsky and which is directed by Joseph Henchery could not possibly be an indifferent one. This one certainly is far from indifferent, but, in our humble opinion, it fails to touch the heights that one would expect from this famed quintet.

There isn't the faintest doubt, though, that "A Sainted Devil" will register all kinds of records in the Mark Strand. It is a great box-office picture, and all yesterday afternoon and last night throngs piled into the theatre in such numbers that Joseph Plunkett's very efficient organization was hard put to it to handle them.

Of course, women outnumbered the men in these crowds by almost two to one. And why not, when the Sheik is featured! And how they liked the picture?

The story is the usual Valentino thing—Spanish atmosphere, tangoes, mantillas, balconies, duennas, knife duels, bandits and such, with a touch of comedy here and there for relief. But lots and lots of scenes are illogical and therefore unconvincing. For instance, when Don Alonzo, played by Valentino, corners the terrible bandit who had razed his hacienda and stolen his bride, the bold, bad bandit cowers and permits the Don to choke him almost to death without striking out in self defense. And up to this point the bandit had been pictured as the menace of the whole country—an outlaw whom it would be suicide to circumvent.

But the Sheik is at his best in the dance numbers. A Valentino picture without a tango would be in the nature of an anachronism, and every time he skipped the light fantastic we were reminded of former days when such things as motion pictures never had entered his head. Nita Naldi was very good in her usual vamp part and Helen D'Algy, as the demure senorita who married the Don, also was good in her limited scenes.

But it was obvious that hundreds of feet of film in which Dagmar Godowsky appeared had felt the fine Italian hand of the censors. The scenes in which Dagmar did appear were a trifle daring, so perhaps the reason for this cutting is not far to seek. At that, though, we would have liked to see more of her.

And there was a girl in the picture who was called Estrella the dancer. She was as good as anybody in the picture, but Estrella was not listed in the program, so we don't know who she is. Our guess is that she is Louise Lagrange, but we are not certain of this.

Altogether, "A Sainted Devil" is a masterful piece of work, but after this we are not going to permit ourselves to get worked up over a picture before it is presented.

Joseph Plunkett's surrounding program is one of the best he has ever arranged. There is a prelude to the picture, arranged by Jacques Gruenberg, and a prologue for the featured picture in which Hurtado's Royal Marimba Band are called back for several encores. The ballet is unusually good, and there is a tenor solo by Everett Clark. Costumes used in the prologue are the originals used in "A Sainted Devil."