

My "Third Man Theme"

Lou Ann Phillips

SEVERAL MONTHS ago I saw the highly praised and greatly discussed motion picture, "The Third Man." My first impression of the over-all production was very favorable, because the movie held my interest. For that reason, in a sense, the movie is a success, since the primary purpose of a motion picture of this type is to entertain. However, after thinking for awhile about "The Third Man," I have decided that the plot of the picture is shallow and meaningless. When analyzed, the movie is actually nothing but unusual photography, local color, and weird background music.

The audience's attention is held by the psychological manner in which the scenes are presented, instead of by the plot. For example, a conversation takes place on a Ferris wheel in a carnival. Nothing significant is said in regard to the story, but the audience is interested in the conversation because of the atmosphere in which it takes place. The movie contains too much local color, such as the use of a great deal of foreign language spoken by the characters. This dialogue only mystifies the audience and apparently complicates the plot, since the average "movie-goer" can not understand what is being said.

But perhaps the most unusual feature of "The Third Man" is the much publicized background music that is played on a zither. This instrument was practically unheard of in America until it became recognized as the popular musical background of this particular motion picture. The music intensifies insignificant conversations by growing louder and louder until the climax of the speech is reached, which, without the music, would undoubtedly be unnoticed by the audience. If the speech itself contained sufficient force, it would not need this emphasis.

I have used "The Third Man" as an example of the weakness of many an American moving picture. The public is too often fooled by mere technical skill used in the handling of scenes and by extraordinary photography and music. Because the average person is satisfied with what he sees on the surface, he does not stop to realize that the motion picture relays no message and has no underlying meaning in general. Much of the material and many of the sequences in movies, as is the case in "The Third Man," are used to fill in and take time, making the picture long enough to be accepted as a full length production. But does the length of a moving picture determine its value? Or does value depend, at least in part, on an inner meaning that can inform the public mind with moral or intellectual truth?