

THE SCREEN IN REVIEW

David Selznick's 'Gone With the Wind' Has Its Long-Awaited Premiere at Astor and Capitol, Recalling Civil War and Plantation Days of South—Seen as Treating Book With Great Fidelity

GONE WITH THE WIND, as adapted by the late Sidney Howard from Margaret Mitchell's novel; directed by Victor Fleming; musical score by Max Steiner; production designer, William Cameron Menzies; special effects by Jack Cosgrove; fire scenes staged by Lee Zavitz; costumes designed by Walter Plunkett; photography by Ernest Haller, supervised for Technicolor Company by Natalie Kalmus; technical advisers, Susan Myrick and Will Price; historian, Wilbur G. Kurtz; produced by David O. Selznick and released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. At the Capitol and Astor Theatres.

Scarlett O'Hara Vivien Leigh
 Rhett Butler Clark Gable
 Ashley Wilkes Leslie Howard
 Melanie Hamilton Olivia de Havilland
 Mammy Hattie McDaniel
 Gerald O'Hara Thomas Mitchell
 Ellen O'Hara Barbara O'Neil
 Frank Kennedy Carroll Nye
 Aunt Pittypat Hamilton Laura Hope Crews
 Doctor Meade Harry Davenport
 Charles Hamilton Rand Brooks
 Belle Watling Ona Munson
 Carreen O'Hara Ann Rutherford
 Brent Tarleton George Reeves
 Stuart Tarleton Fred Crane
 Pork Oscar Polk
 Prissy Butterfly McQueen
 Suellen O'Hara Evelyn Keyes
 Mrs. Merriwether Jane Darwell
 Mrs. Meade Leona Roberts
 Big Sam Everett Brown
 Uncle Peter Eddie Anderson
 Tom a Yankee Captain Ward Bond
 Bonnie Blue Butler Cammie King
 Johnny Gallegher J. M. Kerrigan
 Emmy Slatery Isabel Jewell
 India Wilkes Alicia Rhett
 Jonas Wilkerson Victor Jory
 John Wilkes Howard Hickman
 Maybelle Merriwether Mary Anderson
 A Yankee Looter Paul Hurst
 Cathleen Calvert Marcela Martin
 Beau Wilkes Mickey Kuhn
 Bonnie's Nurse Lillian Kemble Cooper
 Reminiscent Soldier Cliff Edwards
 Elijah Zack Williams



Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh

By FRANK S. NUGENT

Understatement has its uses too, so this morning's report on the event of last night will begin with the casual notation that it was a great show. It ran, and will continue to run, for about 3 hours and 45 minutes, which still is a few days and hours less than its reading time and is a period the spine may protest sooner than the eye or ear. It is pure narrative, as the novel was, rather than great drama, as the novel was not. By that we would imply you will leave it, not with the feeling you have undergone a profound emotional experience, but with the warm and grateful remembrance of an interesting story beautifully told. Is it the greatest motion picture ever made? Probably not, although it is the greatest motion mural we have seen and the most ambitious film-making venture in Hollywood's spectacular history.

It—as you must be aware—is "Gone With the Wind," the gargantuan Selznick edition of the Margaret Mitchell novel which swept the country like Charlie McCarthy, the "Music Goes 'Round" and similar inexplicable phenomena; which created the national emergency over the selection of a Scarlett O'Hara and which, ultimately, led to the \$4,000,000 production that faced the New York public on two Times Square fronts last night, the Astor and the Capitol. It is the picture for which Mr. Gallup's American Institute of Public Opinion has reported a palpantly waiting audience of 56,500,000 persons, a few of whom may find encouragement in our opinion that they won't be disappointed in Vivien Leigh's Scarlett, Clark Gable's Rhett Butler or, for that matter, in Mr. Selznick's Miss Mitchell.

For, by any and all standards, Mr. Selznick's film is a handsome, scrupulous and unstinting version of the 1,037-page novel, matching it almost scene for scene with a literalness that not even Shakespeare or Dickens were accorded in Hollywood, casting it so brilliantly one would have to know the history of the production not to suspect that Miss Mitchell had written her story just to provide a vehicle for the stars already assembled under Mr. Selznick's hospitable roof. To have treated so long a book with such astonishing fidelity required courage—the courage of a producer's convictions and of his pocketbook, and yet, so great a hold has Miss Mitchell on her public, it might have taken more courage still to have changed a line or scene of it.

But if Selznick has made a virtue of necessity, it does not follow, of necessity, that his transcription be expertly made as well. And yet, on the whole, it has been. Through stunning design, costume and peopling, his film has skillfully and absorbingly recreated Miss Mitchell's mural of the South in that bitter decade when secession, civil war and reconstruction ripped wide the graceful fabric of the plantation

age and confronted the men and women who had adorned it with the stern alternative of meeting the new era or dying with the old. It was a large panel she painted, with sections devoted to plantation life, to the siege and the burning of Atlanta, to carpetbaggers and the Ku Klux Klan and, of course, to the Scarlett O'Hara about whom all this changing world was spinning and to whom nothing was important except as it affected her.

Some parts of this extended account have suffered a little in their screen telling, just as others have profited by it. Mr. Selznick's picture-postcard Tara and Twelve Oaks, with a few-score actors posturing on the premises, is scarcely our notion of doing complete justice to an age that had "a glamour to it, a perfection, a symmetry like Grecian art." The siege of Atlanta was splendid and the fire that followed magnificently pyrotechnic, but we do not endorse the superimposed melodramatics of the crates of explosives scorching in the fugitives' path; and we felt cheated, so ungrateful are we, when the

battles outside Atlanta were dismissed in a subtitle and Sherman's march to the sea was summed up in a montage shot. We grin understandingly over Mr. Selznick's romantic omission of Scarlett's first two "birthings," and we regret more comic capital was not made of Rhett's scampish trick on the Old Guard of Atlanta when the army men were rounding up the Klansmen.

But if there are faults, they do not extend to the cast. Miss Leigh's Scarlett has vindicated the absurd talent quest that indirectly turned her up. She is so perfectly designed for the part by art and nature that any other actress in the role would be inconceivable. Technicolor finds her beautiful, but Sidney Howard, who wrote the script, and Victor Fleming, who directed it, have found in her something more: the very embodiment of the selfish, hoydenish, slant-eyed miss who tackled life with both claws and a creamy complexion, asked no odds of any one or anything—least of all her conscience—and faced at last a defeat which, by her very unconquer-

ability, neither she nor we can recognize as final.

Miss Leigh's Scarlett is the pivot of the picture, as she was of the novel, and it is a column of strength in a film that is part history, part spectacle and all biography. Yet there are performances around her fully as valid, for all their lesser prominence. Olivia de Havilland's Melanie is a gracious, dignified, tender gem of characterization. Mr. Gable's Rhett Butler (although there is the fine flavor of the smokehouse in a scene or two) is almost as perfect as the grandstand quarterbacks thought he would be. Leslie Howard's Ashley Wilkes is anything but a pallid characterization of a pallid character. Best of all, perhaps, next to Miss Leigh, is Hattie McDaniel's Mammy, who must be personally absolved of responsibility for that most "unfittin'" scene in which she scolds Scarlett from an upstairs window. She played even that one right, however wrong it was.

We haven't time or space for the others, beyond to wave an approving hand at Butterfly McQueen as Prissy, Thomas Mitchell as Gerald, Ona Munson as Belle Watling, Alicia Rhett as India Wilkes, Rand Brooks as Charles Hamilton, Harry Davenport as Doctor Meade, Carroll Nye as Frank Kennedy. And not so approvingly at Laura Hope Crews's Aunt Pitty, Oscar Polk's Pork (bad casting) and Eddie Anderson's Uncle Peter (oversight). Had we space we'd talk about the tragic scene at the Atlanta terminal, where the wounded are lying, about the dramatic use to which Mr. Fleming has placed his Technicolor—although we still feel that color is hard on the eyes for so long a picture—and about pictures of this length in general. Anyway, "it" has arrived at last, and we cannot get over the shock of not being disappointed; we had almost been looking forward to that.