



FILM: **THE SHOP AROUND THE CORNER**

FDG RATING: 3.5 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Ernst Lubitsch: *director*
Margaret Sullavan: *actress, Klara Novak*
James Stewart: *actor, Alfred Kralik*

DATE: December 13, 2020

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE SHOP AROUND THE CORNER**

Adapted from the Hungarian play by Nikolaus (Miklos) Laszlo, *The Shop Around the Corner*, is a sweet, light-hearted, 1940s romantic comedy, that recalls a very small department store (leather gift shop), Matuschek and Company, in Budapest, which has only six employees. We liked the opening scene as we meet each of the employees as they arrive, waiting for the shop to open.

A young, 32 year old James Stewart is sales manager, Alfred Kralik, and Klara Novak (Margaret Sullavan) is a pretty young lady who wants to be hired. She steps into the shop requesting to speak to the owner who is not available and Alfred asks her to leave, telling her they are not hiring. Instead, she shows off her sales skills by approaching a zaftig woman customer who is looking at a musical cigarette box (Alfred thinks it is a ridiculous, unsaleable item) and tells her it is a candy box that plays music whenever it is opened as a gentle reminder not to eat too many chocolates. Sold. The owner hires her on the spot.

Klara and Alfred are constantly at odds with each other in the shop, disagreeing on almost everything. Outside of work, Klara and Alfred are sending romantic notes to their secret lonely hearts pen pal where they share poetry, thoughts about literature, and love. Little do they know they are actually writing to each other and have unwittingly fallen in love through their letters.

One published critic noted that, "with Europe already at war, this was an unashamedly nostalgic film about maintaining the status quo. The clerks tolerated the indecision and impoliteness of the customers for fear of alienating Mr. Matuschek, who himself dreaded the discovery of his wife's long-suspected infidelity, lest it damage his reputation and authority. Even Alfred and Klara resist the temptation to meet their epistolary sweetheart, in case their romantic illusion was shattered by cruel reality." The film also illustrates the need so many people shared at this time: the desperate necessity to remain employed at a time of economic uncertainty. But those themes are in the background while Alfred and Klara's charming romance is the heart of the story.

The dialogue/banter, is snappy, almost rhythmically choreographed, as seems to be the style for 1940s movies. One discussion participant reminded us that the film industry was still in its infancy. As such, the sets were well done, especially the snow scene which looked authentic. Being made during WWII, people wanted and needed a feel-good film. This one had a sweet story, endearing characters, and humor. Through the ambiance of the shop, you had the feeling of being in another country.

Enchantingly nostalgic, inspiring many contemporary renditions, such as "You've Got Mail", *The Shop Around the Corner*, invited a pleasing score of 3.5 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)

Footnote: Soon after wrapping principal photography, Ernst Lubitsch talked to the New York Sun in January 1940. "It's not a big picture, just a quiet little story that seemed to have some charm. It didn't cost very much, for such a cast, under \$500,000. It was made in twenty-eight days. I hope it has some charm." As for the little shop, Lubitsch remarked, "I have known just such a little shop in Budapest (his father Simon's Berlin outfitters). The feeling between the boss and those who work for him is pretty much the same the world over, it seems to me. Everyone is afraid of losing his job and everyone knows how little human worries can affect his job. If the boss has a touch of dyspepsia, better be careful not to step on his toes; when things have gone well with him, the whole staff reflects his good humor."



See you at the movies!

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