

13

Dir: Joshua LOGAN / USA
Released in Britain: 1958
Running Time: 177 minutes
Colour: Technicolor
Estimated Attendance: 16.5 million

There is nothing like a dame, or a good Rodgers and Hammerstein musical. Two movie versions of the duo's stage hits make it into the Ultimate Film top thirty. *South Pacific* might lag behind *The Sound of Music* in camp appeal (though not by much), but it has unforgettable tunes and lavish locations in abundance.

SOUTH PACIFIC

Director **Joshua Logan**
 Producer **Buddy Adler**
 Screenplay **Paul Osborn**, adapted from the play by **Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II and Joshua Logan**
 Director of Photography **Leon Shamroy**
 Editor **Robert L. Simpson**
 Art Direction **John DeCuir, Lyle R. Wheeler**
 Music **Richard Rodgers**

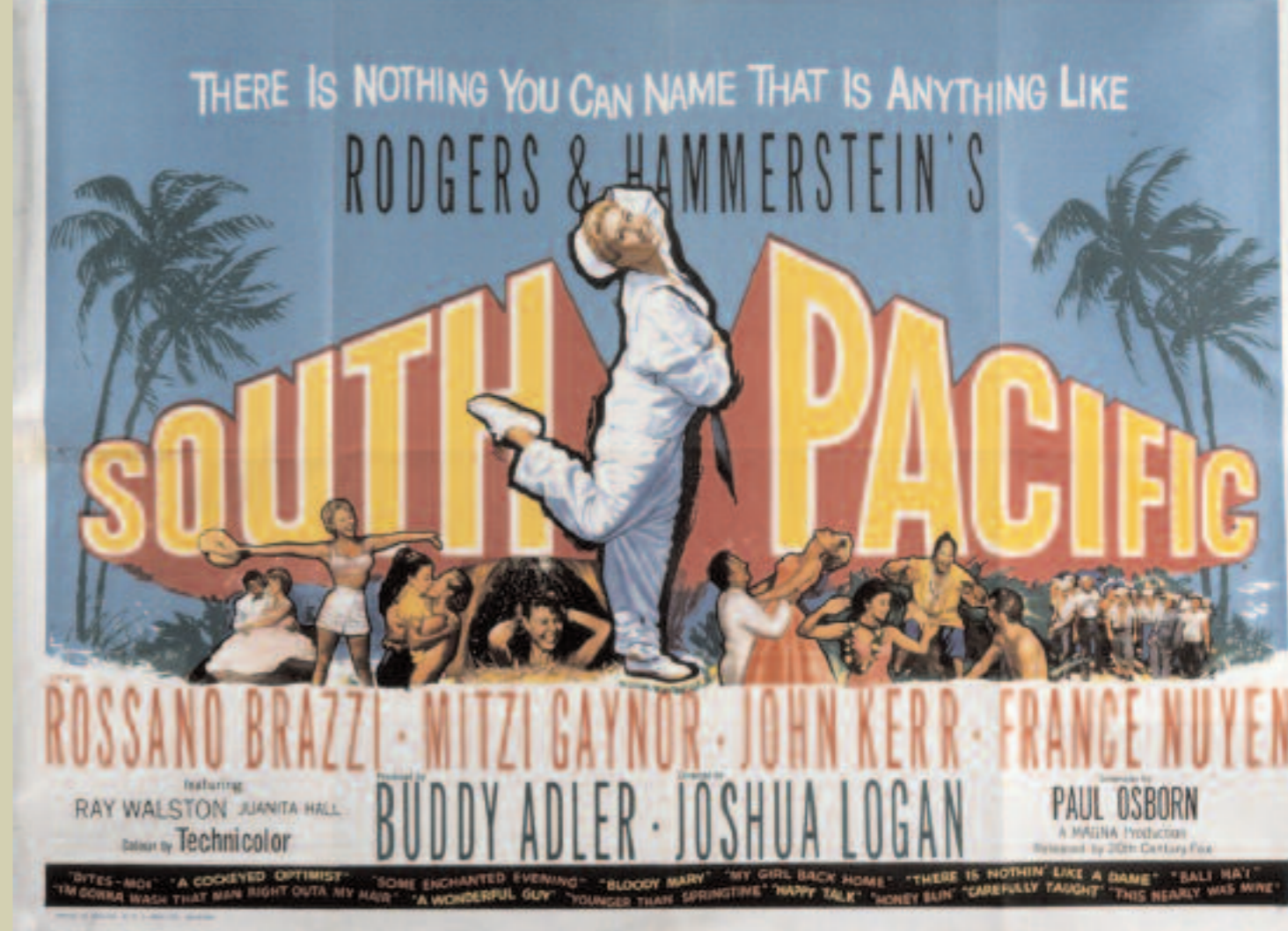
Emile De Becque • Rossano Brazzi
 Nellie Forbush, Ensign, USN • Mitzi Gaynor
 Lt Joseph Cable, USMC • John Kerr
 Luther Billis • Ray Walston
 Bloody Mary • Juanita Hall
 Liat • France Nuyen
 Captain 'Iron Belly' Brackett • Russ Brown
 Commander Harbison • Floyd Simmons
 Lt Buzz Adams • Tom Laughlin
 The Professor • Jack Mullaney
 Stewpot • Ken Clark
 Native Chief • Archie Savage
 Ngana, Emile's Daughter • Candace Lee
 Jerome, Emile's Son • Warren Hsieh
 Henry, Emile's Servant • Francis Kahele
 Communications Man • Robert Jacobs
 Radio Man • John Gabriel
 Co-pilot • Richard Harrison
 Navigator • Ron Ely
 Seabee Dancer • Steve Wiland

THE STORY

In 1943 Nellie Forbush, a young American Navy nurse stationed on a South Pacific island, falls in love with Emile de Becque, a rich French planter. Lt Joseph Cable arrives on the island with orders to find de Becque, whom he hopes to persuade to be his guide on a reconnaissance of the Japanese-held islands in the area. On the strange island of Bali Ha'i, Cable meets and falls in love with Liat – the beautiful daughter of Bloody Mary, a rumbustious native trading woman; but, because of her skin colour, he refuses to marry her. Then Nellie learns that de Becque has two Eurasian children by a previous marriage to a Polynesian woman. Deeply shocked, she breaks off her engagement with him and, in the mood of dejection that follows, he agrees to guide Cable through the islands. Together the two men are able to radio back to the Americans vital information about Japanese troop movements. When Nellie hears that de Becque has gone with Cable she realises how foolish her prejudices were. Cable is killed by the Japanese, but de Becque manages to escape back to the American island. At his hill-top home he finds Nellie, and his two children, waiting for him.

WHAT THEY SAID THEN ...

As an attraction, it must be readily granted that *South Pacific* is the biggest of the cinema's blockbusters in the battle against television. A mammoth of a film, packed with colourful entertainment values, it is also, alas, a crashing bore. Joshua Logan's direction is portentous, lacking in surprise and vitality; and his attempts to create mood and atmosphere by the use of colour are banal. During key scenes the screen is bathed in deep tints – yellow, red, gold – to produce a weird, magic-lantern effect; one scene gives the principals charcoal complexions and cement-coloured lips. This method also results in nerve-racking moments when the colour tries to return to normal – which it does in a series of violent jerks.



Below changed the movies and the way they are marketed for *The meticulously spectacular Gone With The Wind*, the Technicolor mother of



The chief pleasure to be had from the film is, of course, the music – a superior Rodgers and Hammerstein score. The sound is first-class, with particularly good balance between chorus and orchestra in the playing over the credit titles; with five loudspeakers along the top of the screen, and twenty-seven more scattered around the auditorium, it remains the best sound system yet heard in the cinema. In general the acting is routine and lacklustre. Mitzi Gaynor has a brave but unsuccessful try at the skittish Nellie Forbush. Rossano Brazzi borders on a caricature of mannered romantic charm. The best performance is given by Ray Walston, whose vigorous playing of the conniving Luther Billis is highly enjoyable.

WHAT THEY SAY NOW ...

Shot largely on Hawaii, doubling for the Polynesian islands on which it's set, *South Pacific* helped usher in a vogue for musicals that boasted lavish location filming. But while director Joshua Logan includes many gorgeous vistas of this Pacific idyll (enhanced by colour filters), he lacked the flexibility and fluidity of movement that filming in a studio allows. The result is an often static movie with pedestrian dance numbers – it's hard to shake a leg when you're sinking in sand. Lacking the delirious inventiveness of Hollywood-made musicals such as

Singin' in the Rain, *South Pacific* feels like a 'straight' adaptation of an existing stage success, an impression heightened by the film's theatrical structure, complete with intermission breaks and an overture.

But despite its lack of cinematic flair, *South Pacific* has in plentiful supply that key ingredient for all successful musicals: beautifully sung renditions of beautifully written songs. Rodgers and Hammerstein's score features some of their best work: 'There is Nothing Like a Dame', 'Happy Talk' and 'You've Got to be Carefully Taught' (which, unusually for a musical of the time, touched on the issue of racism and miscegenation, although the stage musical's liberal treatment of this is compromised by the film's condescending portrayal of the native inhabitants). *South Pacific* may at times be as 'corny as Kansas in August' (as Mitzi Gaynor sings), but it sounds wonderful.

CLASSIC QUOTE

'I hear that the human race / is falling on its face / And hasn't very far to go.'

SCENE STEALER

Frustrated by the lack of available women on the island where they are stationed, US Navy sailors, led by the irrepressible Luther Billis, bemoan their lot in song. Cue a fun, beachside rendition of 'There is Nothing Like a Dame'.



BEHIND THE SCENES

Acting in his capacity as executive producer, Oscar Hammerstein called for an expensive reshoot of the scene in which Mitzi Gaynor sings 'I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Out of My Hair', convinced that it wasn't as good as the stage version. Logan clashed with Hammerstein, but eventually relented and later said of the lyricist's decision: 'He was right.'

HOLDING THE BATON

Composer Richard Rodgers had already enjoyed a hit Broadway career with Lorenz Hart before collaborating in 1943 with lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II (whose writing partners had included Jerome Kern and George Gershwin) on the stage show *Oklahoma!* The success of that show began a run of blockbuster productions on Broadway, a successful track record that only Andrew Lloyd Webber has ever neared equalling. Rodgers and Hammerstein were also able to maintain this popularity and reputation for quality in their movie adaptations. With films such as *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel* and *The King and I* doing huge box office, their partnership became a byword for lavish, expensive musicals, often filmed outside the confines of the studio. Their most popular movie in Britain, *The Sound of Music* – credited with helping save its studio 20th Century-Fox from ruin – was also their last collaboration: Hammerstein died soon after its release.

OSCARS

3 nominations, 1 winner

Cinematography (Color): Leon Shamroy
Music (Scoring): Alfred Newman, Ken Darby
Sound: Fred Hynes

WHAT WON THAT YEAR?

Actor: David Niven *Separate Tables*
Actress: Susan Hayward *I Want To Live!*
Directing: Vincente Minnelli *Gigi*
Best Motion Picture: Arthur Freed *Gigi*

BAFTAS

0 nominations

WHAT WON THAT YEAR?

Film: *Room at the Top*
British Actor: Trevor Howard *The Key*
Foreign Actor: Sidney Poitier *The Defiant Ones*
British Actress: Irene Worth *Orders to Kill*
Foreign Actress: Simone Signoret *Room at the Top*

Below changed the movies and the way they are marketed for *The meticulously spectacular Gone With The Wind*, the Technicolor mother of

