

Le Carrosse d'or is the first of Renoir's three theatre films of the 1950's—the others being *French Cancan* and *Elena et les hommes*. In each he fills the stage/screen with a spectacle of action, sets, and costumes, with a childlike glee at his powers of manipulation. In keeping with the *commedia dell'arte* flavor, he chose Vivaldi's music for its lightness of spirit, making the music an integral part of the film.

Renoir drew forth the finest performance of Anna Magnani's career with this picture and called her "the greatest actress I have ever worked with." Her Camilla is a brilliant tour de force. *Le Carrosse d'or* is a charming film, and while minor Renoir, it is a testament to his warmth, good humor, and sense of whimsy.

—Ronald Bowers

CARRY ON NURSE.

UK, 1959.

Director: Gerald Thomas.

Production: Nat Cohen and Stuart Levy; black and white; running time: 86 minutes. Released March 1959.

Producer: Peter Rogers; screenplay: Norman Hudis; photography: Reg Wyer; editor: John Shirley; art director: Alex Vetchinsky; music: Bruce Montgomery.

Cast: Kenneth Williams (*Oliver Reckitt*); Kenneth Connor (*Bernie Bishop*); Charles Hawtrey (*Hinton*); Hattie Jacques (*Matron*); Bill Owen (*Percy Hickson*); Leslie Phillips (*Jack Bell*); Joan Sims (*Stella Dawson*); Shirley Eaton (*Dorothy Denton*); Terence Longdon (*Ted York*); Wilfred Hyde White (*Colonel*); Susan Stephen (*Georgie Axwell*); Michael Medwin (*Ginger*); Susan Shaw (*Mrs. Bishop*); Susan Beaumont (*Frances James*); Jill Ireland (*Jill Thompson*).

Publications:

Books:

Eastaugh, Kenneth, *The Carry On Book*, London, 1978.

Articles:

Kine Weekly (London), 5 March 1959.

Variety (New York), 18 March 1959.

Monthly Film Bulletin (London), April 1959.

Hollywood Reporter, 15 March 1960.

Rogers, Peter, "Carrying On in the Cinema," in *Twentieth Century* (London), July 1961.

Richardson, Gina, "Carry On Carries on," in *Time and Tide* (London), 17 December 1964.

Cameron-Wilson, James "What a Carry On," in *Film Review 1979-80*, edited by F. Maurice Speed, London, 1979.

Jordan, Marion, "Carry On . . . Follow that Stereotype," in *British Cinema History*, edited by James Curran and Vincent Porter, London, 1983.

Barthes, Roland, "The Nautilus and the Nursery," in *Sight and Sound* (London), Spring 1985.

Medhurst, Andy, "British Cinema and the Music Hall," in *All Our Yesterdays*, edited by Charles Barr, London, 1986.

* * *

Whatever its critical status, one of the great commercial successes of the postwar British cinema has been the long-running *Carry On* series. Beginning with *Carry On Sergeant* in 1958, this was to continue on a regular basis for over 20 years so that, by the time of the release of the *That's Carry On* compilation in 1978, 28 films had appeared bearing the *Carry On* title. For a series possessing such remarkable powers of survival, it is ironic that the first of the batch was neither envisaged as the start of a series nor even as a particularly attractive commercial proposition. Sydney Box had already failed to raise financial backing for a film of the novel on which *Carry On Sergeant* was based before Peter Rogers, the producer of all the *Carry On* films, acquired the rights, while Gerald Thomas, the regular *Carry On* director, joined the film only after both Muriel Box and Val Guest had turned it down. Even the *Carry On* title was unoriginal and was borrowed from Val Guest's naval comedy of the previous year, *Carry On Admiral* (which, in a further twist, was subsequently re-released to cash in on the surprise success of the other *Carry On*'s). Despite these inauspicious beginnings, *Carry On Sergeant* proved to be a major box-office success and was quickly followed by *Carry On Nurse*. This was an even greater success and became the British cinema's biggest money-maker for 1959, ahead of both *Room at the Top* and *I'm All Right Jack*. Even more bizarrely, it was a major hit in the United States where it apparently earned \$2½ million in its first two years and met with an unexpected critical approval.

Between them *Carry On Sergeant* and *Carry On Nurse* were to establish a number of ingredients which were to become typical of the early films. These included an institutional setting, an episodic plot structure built around comic set-pieces and a nucleus of actors who were to become identified with the series, most notably Kenneth Williams, Charles Hawtrey, Hattie Jacques, and Kenneth Connor, all of whom appeared in the first two features (as well as Joan Sims who made her debut in the second). But, whereas *Carry On Sergeant* had been played (with a few exceptions) relatively straight, *Carry On Nurse* was notable for its introduction of the robust vulgarity which was destined to become the trademark of the series. Thus, what had been relatively marginal to *Carry On Sergeant*—sexual innuendo, double entendre, lavatorial humour, and jokes based upon physical and sexual discomfort—now became central to *Carry On Nurse*. The hospital setting—with its opportunities for scenes of both physical intimacy and embarrassment—was to prove ideal, in this regard, and was returned to on numerous occasions (*Carry On Doctor*, *Carry On Again, Doctor*, *Carry On Matron*). Such humour was not, of course, new and evidently drew inspiration from both the bawdier elements of music-hall and the tradition of the seaside postcard (with its fascination for large breasts, buttocks, and saucy double entendres). It was, however, relatively unexpected in the context of the British cinema and, as Charles Barr has suggested, the enormous popularity of the series indicates the extent to which they provided satisfactions which other British films of the time had

Carry On Nurse



ceased to give. To this degree, the films deserve credit for enlarging the range of what the British cinema was able to say and do, and it was not uncommon for critics of the time to cite *Carry On Nurse* alongside *Room at the Top* as an example of the progress being made against censorship.

The appeal of the films, however, did not rely on vulgarity alone. For they also seemed to embody a certain degree of anarchic energy which, once again, contrasted with the rather staid conservatism of contemporary British comedies. In particular, a common pattern of the early films was the resistance displayed by the characters to the order and routine imposed upon them by their institutional environments. Thus, in *Carry On Nurse*, Kenneth Williams, the apparently weedy intellectual, attempts to lead a revolt against the injustice of the Matron (inevitably Hattie Jacques) while the patients as a whole embark upon a do-it-yourself operation towards the film's close. What added to this aspect of the films was not only the familiarity of the institutions chosen (the hospital, the school, the army, the police) but the degree of social accuracy with which they were often observed (*Carry On Nurse*, for example, amusingly deflates the social pretensions of a snobbish patient). With the appearance of *Carry On Jack* and *Carry On Spying* in 1964, the direction of the series was to shift towards the parody of other film genres (a trend possibly encouraged by the replacement of Norman Hudis by Talbot Rothwell as screenwriter). Although many critics saw this as an advance, it was also at the expense of what had often been best about the early *Carry On* films, such as *Carry On Nurse*: the closeness to contemporary realities and relative freshness of social observation.

—John Hill
