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REVIVALS IN FOCUS

A CRITICAL GUIDE BY ANDREW SARRIS & TOM ALLEN



MOMA FILM STILLS ARCHIVE

The Smiling Lieutenant: against the glut of pastiche

FRIDAY

Ernst Lubitsch's **THE SMILING LIEUTENANT** (1931), from a screenplay by Ernest Vajda, Samson Raphaelson, and Lubitsch, based on the operetta *A Waltz Dream* by Leopold Jacobson and Felix Dor-

mann and a novel by Hans Müller, with Maurice Chevalier, Miriam Hopkins, Claudette Colbert, and Charles Ruggles, is Lubitsch's most rarely shown masterwork from his crucial years of experimenting with soundtrack innovations. As in *The Love Parade*, he was using Chevalier as his cutting edge and sole musical talent in going against the glut of all-singing, all-dancing musical pastiches. The romance, otherwise, was in

the capable hands of two first-rate dramatic actresses, Colbert as the lieutenant's *demimon-daine* lover and Hopkins as a snooty princess who literally captures his eye. Since most of the sympathy goes with both the character and acting of Colbert, the "moral" ending of the operetta, in which Chevalier stays with the princess, leaves a sour aftertaste. It's a supreme tribute to Colbert's warmth that she could overcome the lilt in the Lubitsch touch at this stage in his career. Quite aptly, the flashiest directorial touch involves a Chevalier wink inadvertently caught by the wrong woman as the royal carriage goes by. The entire film is built on this one visual conceit. (Beginning a massive retrospective of Paramount Pictures on the occasion of its 75th anniversary; a new print from the Pacific Film Archives will be screened.) **Museum of Modern Art, Theatre 1: 2:30 p.m.; also Sunday at 5 p.m.**