

## Document Citation

Title	'La ronde' revisited at Surf revival
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Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	1970 Feb 02
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	La ronde, Ophüls, Max, 1950





2/2/70 Isa Miranda and Gerard Philipe in a scene from 'La Ronde'

# 'La Ronde' Revisited at Surf Revival

By Michael Grieg

Some film classics should be seen once. But never, never, never twice. Therein lies disappointment.

Among such one-time-only masterpieces, this moviegoer would fearlessly list "Birth of a Nation," "Ten Days That Shook the World," "Winterset," "Spectre of the Rose."

And, alas, the most daring film of 1950, Max Ophuls' "La Ronde," at the Surf which concludes the theater's current cycle of French screen classics.

Sad to say, by one for whom it was a memorable part of his callow post-youth, "La Ronde" (the French word for "round") is like meeting an old girl friend 20 years later. Once the fond object of dreams, she now strikes one as a blowzy, boring, flabby, peroxide-blond matron.

Many embraces later, the thrill of that first kiss is gone. And you kick yourself: "What did I ever see in her?"

Well, one saw a dream cast — 20 years younger — that included (ahhh!) Danielle Darrieux, Simone Signoret, Gerard Philipe, Anton Walbrook, Jean-Louis Barrault . . . And (where, indeed, are the snows of yesteryear?) Simone Simon.

Oh, their faces are still so beguiling, like faded snapshots in a family album.

Still enthralling, too, in a way, like a forever vanished world are Ophuls' props of pre-World War I Vienna, a range of glittering chandeliers and elegant bedsteads.

But it is not enough.

Mainly, it's all the fault, so it seems on a second viewing, of a stale cream puff of a plot, the once-droll cynicism of Arthur Schnitzler's play "Reigen," on which the film is based.

A game of musical beds, with lover going in turn from the arms of one to another, this is the film that once made censors cringe. So daring in its time, it took a Supreme Court decision before it could be shown in Ohio and even New York.

Now one wonders what all

the fuss was about. Alongside "I Am Curious (Yellow)" or "Vixen," "La Ronde" seems curiously, vixenishly juvenile as blackouts stop the action just as lovers crawl into bed with each other.

And the characters, an up-right husband (Fernand Gravet) with a mistress on the side and, jumping Mexican beans!, a whore-with-heart-of-gold (Miss Signoret), well . . .

Even the rakish camera angles, bold in 1950, now seem as contrived and dreary as the waltz by Oscar ("The Chocolate Soldier") Strauss that accompanies, ad Weltschmerz nauseam, the superficial complications of lovers on a merry-go-round.

Oh, mind you, there are still

some pleassant bits. Like an occasional witticism: "I adore the past — it is so much more restful than the present." Or, Gerard Philipe as the dashing lieutenant, when — after seducing an actress — he politely asks that she convey his compliments to her mother.

And one can still gaze, to distraction, at the soft-focus beauty of a younger Danielle Darrieux and Simone Signoret.

On the Surf bill with "La Ronde" is Rene Clair's memorable comedy, "A Nous La Liberte." But you won't catch this reviewer taking a chance on seeing that again. Old age deserves some vibrant memories.