

Document Citation

Title	'Banana' is French farce at its finest
Author(s)	Kevin Thomas
Source	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>
Date	1965 Apr 22
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Peau de banane (Banana peel), Ophüls, Marcel, 1963



Jean-Paul Belmondo in "Banana Peel."

'Banana' Is French Farce at Its Finest

BY KEVIN THOMAS

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"Banana Peel" brings together again Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jeanne Moreau, this time for laughs.

It's a pleasure to watch France's two brightest screen stars strike fire in comedy just as effectively as they smoldered in the tragic "Moderato Cantabile." For foreign film fans there could not be a team more combustible than the homely-handsome Belmondo and the world-weary Moreau.

In "Banana Peel," a funny, fragile farce at the Cinema and Tivoli-Plaza Theaters, they play a pair of stylish swindlers out to even the score with some crooks who bilked Miss Moreau's father years ago (a delightful pretext that puts them on the side of the angels no matter what they do). Along the way they meet up with Gert (Goldfinger) Frobe, a bad billionaire who quickly falls under Miss Moreau's potent spell but almost steals the show with his jaunty cha-cha-cha.

With a sure sense of style and pace, director Marcel Ophuls, son of the late Max, never slips on his skittish, slight "Banana Peel" (the name of a race horse that loses for Belmondo his last franc).

An essay in elegance as well as comedy, it creates a world in which what counts is the way the game is played no matter how crooked.

Moving gracefully across the Riviera, Belmondo and Miss Moreau are the epitome of the savoir faire, at all times equipped for every situation from ordering vintage wines to improvising past histories and fake identities.

While it would spoil the show to outline the highly intricate schemes Miss Moreau devises to snare her victims, it should be mentioned they provide at one instance an opportunity for her and Belmondo to assume hilarious German accents and at all times for Miss Moreau to wear a chic, expensive wardrobe.

On the whole, "Banana Peel" is as much fun as "That Man from Rio" though more work since its sophisticated humor is largely verbal, thus relying heavily on subtitles (fortunately good) to let us know what's going on. What the picture lacks most is color—this picture is a natural for the process—but, as if in compensation, Miss Moreau sings an enchanting song "Embrassez-Moi."