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FRENCH CANCAN, France Italy, 1955

Certificate: A. *Distributors:* Miracle. *Production Companies:* Franco London Film-Jolly Film. *Director:* Jean Renoir. *Script:* André-Paul Antoine, *Adaptation:* Jean Renoir. *Photography:* Michel Kelber. *Colour Process:* Technicolor. *Editor:* Boris Lewyn. *Art Director:* Max Douy. *Music:* Georges Van Parys. *Choreography:* G. Grandjean. *Sound:* Antoine Petitjean. *Leading Players:* Jean Gabin (*Danglard*), Francoise Arnoul (*Nini*), Maria Felix (*La Belle Abbessse*), Jean-Roger Caussimon (*Baron Walter*), Philippe Clay (*Casimir*), Anna Amendola (*Esther Georges*), Giani Esposito (*The Prince*), Max Dalban (*Owner of "La Reine Blanche"*), Dora Doll (*La Genisse*), Gaston Modot (*Danglard's Servant*), Jean Paredes (*Coudrier*), Michèle Philippe (*Eleanore*), Jean-Marc Tennberg (*Savate*). *Guest Artists:* Edith Piaf, Patachou, André Claveau, Jean Raymond. 8,759 ft. 97 mins.

Paris, in the late 1880's; the era of the music halls is beginning. Danglard, who runs the Chinese Pagoda, is doing quite well there with an exotic entertainer, La Belle Abbessse, who is also his mistress, but is on the look out for a new enterprise. In a cheap dance hall he discovers Nini, a laundry girl, and decides that she has talent. His backer, Baron Walter, agrees to finance the building of a new music hall, the Moulin Rouge, at which Nini will be the star. The jealousy of La Belle Abbessse causes Walter to withdraw his support, but a Balkan prince desperately in love with Nini offers to put up the money instead. Nini, now happily in love with Danglard, rehearses for the opening show, but on the first night at the Moulin Rouge discovers that her lover is now interested in a new discovery, a singer. At first she refuses to go on; then Danglard talks to her, points out that she has to choose between theatre and life—she is unlikely to achieve happiness in both—and so Nini launches the Cancan.

Jean Renoir's new film, his first in France since *La Règle du Jeu* (1939), is first of all a declaration of love to a vanished period. The Paris of the café concerts is evoked in a series of exquisite impressionist scenes—vivid and nostalgic, sad and tender. The story, slight and discursive, that runs through the film, reveals some favourite Renoir preoccupations—theatre and life (as in *Le Carrosse d'Or* and his play *Orvet*)—and allows for some beautifully individual character studies. This period is re-created as much through its human beings as its decoration. The final Cancan sequence—in which the destinies of all the characters are merged into the rhythm and colour of the dance—is a wonderful conception, impeccably executed.

In its relatively diffuse narrative line, its concern for atmospheric rather than dramatic continuity, *French Cancan* continues the method of Renoir's films since *The River*. Both Jean Gabin and Francoise Arnoul are excellent, and there are almost too brief appearances by Patachou and Edith Piaf as famous singers of the period (Yvette Guilbert and Eugenie Buffet).

The version of the film shown in this country is some eight minutes shorter than the original, the cuts having apparently been made by the distributors.

Suitability: A, B.

G.L.