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VARIETY

Reviews

"WHITE VOICES"

Voci Bianche

(I Castrati)

(ITALO-FRENCH—COLOR)

Comedy-satire much in the manner of an Italian "Tom Jones," this has foreign possibilities on content and handling plus several exploitable pegs.

"White Voices" in the title are those of "castrates" which per historical fact were in 17th Century Rome to provide choir voices as well as the female thesping forbidden at the time for women. Often, poverty forced families to sell their sons into this profession. Pic deals with ne'er-do-well Roman, Meo, who first tries to sell his brother, who escapes. When he himself is trapped into being recruited, he pays off a surgeon not to perform the operation, and feigns the growing effeminecy it would have produced.

Though disgusted and frustrated, he plays along in fear of punishment, soon discovering that his "position" gives him a "safe" status with women at various courts and palaces he visits, femmes whom he resolutely proceeds to seduce, unsuspected by their husbands who feel him inoffensive. In this finale, however, he's caught, and rather than face beheading, he voluntarily agrees to the operation on theory that "it's better to lose one's virility than one's head."

This explosive subject is treated with tongue-in-cheek humor but is never openly tasteless or disgust-

ing, as it easily might have been. Travesty aspects are all there, and very graphically rendered, too, in various exchanges between the "hero" and his colleagues, but they are rendered matter-of-factly as they presumably were in period covered. In fact, the plight of the group is exemplified in character well played by Vittorio DiPrioli who eventually commits suicide when he realizes he is physically unable to consummate his love for a girl (Jeanne Valerie). And there is plenty of lusty good humor in hero's many affairs with a bunch of busty beauties, played by Graziella Granata, Barbara Steele, Jacqueline Sassard, Anouk Aimee, and Sandra Milo, all of them striking looking femmes.

Script meanders a bit and a faster pace could have helped. Dialog, in tight Roman accent, is very good, though this facet may not register with foreign ears. An outstanding contribution to the pic is color lensing by Ennio Guarnieri (in Technicolor-Techniscope), among best efforts of the year in this sector, both for its interiors and the location shots which bring out the beauty of spectacular settings around Rome and Naples. Playing is suitable on all sides. Paolo Ferrari is fine as Meo. Vittorio Caprioli has a gem of a performance as a friend while Philippe Leroy solidly plays his aristocrat. Leopoldo Trieste again registers in a colorful bit. The women have little to do except look beautiful, and this they do.

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