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FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

1940

120 min.

Directed by Alfred Hitchcock; produced by Walter Wanger; screenplay by Charles Bennett and Joan Harrison; dialog by James Hilton and Robert Benchley; photography by Rudolph Mate; music by Alfred Newman. With Joel McCrea, Laraine Day, Herbert Marshall, George Sanders, Albert Basserman, Robert Benchley.

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT, one of Alfred Hitchcock's most dazzling collections of tour-de-force scenes, is also, with TOPAZ, TORN CURTAIN and NOTORIOUS, one of his few films to deal directly with current events; the screenplay of FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT went through at least 14 drafts in order to keep abreast of the latest developments in Europe. The story deals with an American reporter's involvement in finding the whereabouts of a Dutch diplomat, who has been kidnapped by a Nazi spy-ring masquerading as a pacifist organization. Designed partly to confront American apathy on the war in Europe, the film ends with a dramatic plea from a falling continent.

Despite its slightly propagandistic intent, however, FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT is not lacking in the realistic subtlety and moral ambiguity that characterize Hitchcock's best films. As usual, there is a sympathetically portrayed villain, and, as Andrew Sarris has noted, the hero "recalls Celine's unconventional description of American men as supple and treacherous in their dealings with Europeans." The film contains some of Hitchcock's most famous set-pieces, including an assassination (provocatively accomplished by a gun in a camera) in a sea of bobbing black umbrellas; a windmill whose blades are mysteriously turning the wrong way; and a spectacularly realistic plane crash at sea, followed by a fight for survival that presages Hitchcock's 1944 film, LIFEBOAT.

"Still arguably the director's best American film. A dazzling directorial tour de force . . . Hitchcock has seldom equalled its parade of brilliantly inventive set pieces."

—Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg, Hollywood in the Forties

"If you would like a seminar in how to make a movie travel the lightest and fastest way, in a kind of beauty that is peculiar to movies alone, you can see this once, and then again to see what you missed, and then study it twice."

—Otis Ferguson, The New Republic