

Document Citation

Title	No. 17
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Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	1980 Jul 13
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Number seventeen, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1932

NO.17 (1932)

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~~see Truffaut book for credits~~

Hitchcock's last "small" film, "Number 17" was made in 1932 for the fast-collapsing British International Pictures.

Only the untypical "Waltzes from Vienna" stood between it and 1934's "The Man Who Knew Too Much", which launched his highly successful series of thrillers for Gaumont-British.

"Number 17" was a very cheap production, never released in the U.S.A. (tonight's showing therefore is a 40-years-delayed San Francisco premiere) and Hitchcock himself dislikes it, probably because he is a technical perfectionist and the film does show its extreme economy. Too, it is all action and style, with virtually no content; most directors today seem to feel that their films have to "say something" and they look ~~down~~ down on their earlier work which sought only to be entertaining exercises in style. The first half of "Number 17" displays many echoes of Hitchcock's apprenticeship in Germany, and is fine~~d~~ atmospheric, "old-house" stuff. After a slightly protracted middle section, it launches into a marvellously exciting climactic chase, which actually occupies the last ~~two~~ third of the film, and is still a most impressive example of editing and imaginative (if extended) use of miniatures. The over-generous footage devoted to a Cockney comedian (Leon M. Lion) is unfortunate, but since he also produced the film it is presumably understandable. Lion was a very successful theatrical impressario, who put on plays of a high order and with more apparent concern for art than commerce, so ~~presumably~~ presumably one shouldn't assess his contributions to the arts of theatre and film from this one rather irksome performance. The film is based on a dull and stodgy novel

by Herbert ~~Frank~~ Farjeon, but as always, Hitchcock totally reshaped it; the chase for example does not figure at all in the novel.

Although it was taken seriously at the time, Hitchcock intended "Number 17" as a spoof of the genre, which accounts for some of its deliberate lapses in logic. Spoof or not, it's an exciting film and one can find in it many of the roots for his later films.

A book by Rodney Ackland entitled "The Celluloid Mistress" contains a good deal of first-hand information on the shooting of the film. (Ackland was an actor-writer-director, assigned as Hitchcock's assistant and co-scripter on the film). It's an excellent book on British film generally, and can usually be found through bookstores specialising in film material. - Wm K. Everson

Credits { NUMBER 17 (1932) directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Production: British International Pictures; Producer: John Maxwell; Scenario: Alfred Hitchcock from the play and novel by Jefferson Farjeon; Photography: Jack Cox; Studio: Elstree; Principal Actors: Leon M. Lion (Ben); Anne Grey (young girl); John Stuart (detective); Donald Calthrop, Barry Jones, Garry Marsh.