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The Devil's Envoys

(*Les Visiteurs du Soir*)

Superdrama release of Andre Paulve production. Stars Arletty; features Jules Berry, Marie Dea, Alain Cuny, Fernand Ledoux. Directed by Marcel Carne. Screenplay, Jacques Prevert and Pierre Laroche. At Ambassador, N. Y., starting Aug. 29, '47. Running time, 118 MINS.

Dominique	Arletty
Devil	Jules Berry
Anne	Marie Dea
Baron Hugues	Fernand Ledoux
Giles	Alain Cuny
Le Boncreau	Gabriel Gabrio
Chevalier Renaud	Marcel Herrand
Le Gros Seigneur	Pierre Labry

Although it was made late in 1944, after the liberation, "The Devil's Envoys" has some of the basic characteristics of much of the dramatic entertainment produced in France during the Occupation. That is, the story is romantic legend and the theme is classic morality. In this instance, however, there is little contemporary significance in the yarn about two damned souls who return to earth to corrupt the human race, but remain long enough for one to be saved by a girl's love.

"The Devil's Envoys" is an interesting picture, but probably a trifle puzzling for average American audiences, and too vague and slow-moving for general popularity. It's hardly promising fare for regular run houses, but may do moderately in the arty spots. The picture won't be easy to exploit, either, as it has only low-wattage love interest, no spectacular dramatic or topical idea and no names familiar to the U. S. public.

Film's story is based on an old French legend. It is a sort of love-conquers-all version of the Good-versus-Evil theme, but isn't too well pointed or paced in the script. The early scenes, in which the two Devil's disciples arrive at the castle in time to entertain the banquet guests and presently disrupt the household, are promising. Some of the Devil's later scenes are amusing, too. But the yarn itself is slow and the direction further retards it. Also, the picture's closing scenes, in which the Devil is outwitted by the mortal girl, wander and have a letdown quality. Technically, the picture is about average for a French-made.

"The Devil's Envoys" has the same writer-director-star combination as "Les Enfants du Paradis" ("Children of Paradise"). In this production, Arletty again plays an enigmatic femme fatale, handling the assignment with skill and poise suggesting Hollywood possibilities. Jules Berry, as Satan, gives a standout character-comedy performance, revealing excellent range, flexibility and personal impact. The others are less notable, though Alain Cuny is acceptable as the lost soul saved by a girl's devotion, and Marie Dea is dramatically satisfactory as the mortal heroine.

The film's running time, just two minutes short of two hours, would profit by severe cutting. *Hobe.*

Sept. 3, '47.