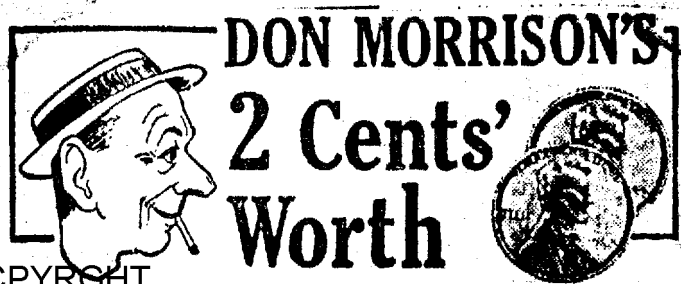


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The Century Theater was full of young people Wednesday afternoon. Manager Tom Martin watched the youngsters streaming in and out and shook his head happily.

"It seems like years since we've had the kids in here," he said.

Small wonder, considering that recent features at the Century have run to heavyweight adult films like "Days of Wine and Roses" and "Term of Trial." The attraction that is bringing the kids in now is so far from being heavyweight that they probably had to nail lead ballast on the screen.

'Call Me Bwana' Tickles Tribe of Youngsters

It is "Call Me Bwana," a new Bob Hope movie that is just like all the old Bob Hope movies only not as good. In fact, it is pretty bad, but the youngsters were yocking it up just as I did when I was their age.

It seems quite a while since I last saw a genuine, blown-in-the-bottle, copper-riveted, stem-winding, beveled, triple-distilled Bob Hope movie of the old style. "Alias Jesse James," I think, was the last. More recently, the master has tended toward sophisticated comedies like the recent "Critic's Choice."

But, "Call Me Bwana" has all the vintage ingredients. Hope is a writer who makes his living writing first-person books about his African adventures. He has never been out of New York and gets his information from the diary of a deceased uncle, who really was an old Africa hand. In a standard Bob Hope movie plot, the CIA drafts him to recover a secret space capsule that has landed in unexplored territory peopled by hostile tribesmen. So, O.K., we now have the setup in which congenital coward Hope must falteringly engage in ~~dealing~~ do.

Next, you need a bosomy broad for Hope to pitch pachydermatous woo at. Anita Ekberg is it—with Edie Adams thrown in for full weight. Anita is a Communist agent also trying to get at the capsule. Edie is a—get this—CIA agent sent along to protect Hope. What more need be said?

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Actually, the picture starts out moderately well. Hope is given some chance to get off his special kind of joke. When the CIA men brace him for the assignment, he urges: "Try Robert Ruark—he flinches a little, but he's a good man." They hand him a phial of cyanide pills in case he is captured and tell him that death will be instantaneous. "Oh, good," says Hope, "no side-effects, eh?"

But, even this cheerful juvenilia soon deteriorates into a desperate struggle to get a laugh. There is a painful sequence in which Arnold Palmer pops up in Africa to play a game of golf with Hope. Palmer quite obviously couldn't read even a funny line, let alone do anything with the bilge he is given to say. Hope walks through the dreary windup in an absent-minded fashion that is the best possible commentary on the material supplied him. As I said, the kids like it. Normally, I can easily will myself into that regressed state necessary to enjoy an old-style Bob Hope movie, but this one defeated my best intentions.

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