

You and Me (1938)

A Brechtian moral lesson play by Fritz Lang

Fritz Lang's *You and Me* is a curious cinematic adventure. Basically, it's a *boy meets girl* story from an original story by **Norman Krasna** : but there's also some bit of Rene Clair, Marc Blitzstein, Orson Welles and European flavouring in it, too.



SYNOPSIS

Opening montages dramatically discourse, in Kurt Weill music with Sam Coslow's lyrics, that *You Can't Get Something for Nothing* and that "you've got to pay for it". The montage shots of jewels, perfumes and other epicurean delicacies that can be bought in a modern consumer driven society visually illustrate the premise. This wide variety of items is also arranged into abstract visual patterns stacked up in piles or in rectangular grids which resemble the imaginary buildings Kazimir Malevich sculpted out of 3D white solids.

Then it pans into Morris' department store which Harry Carey runs on a rehabilitation basis. Some 50 of his 2,500 employees are ex-convicts out on parole and getting their comeback chance from him. **George Raft** is one of them. The parole is clear. But George is a dreamer, falls in love and secretly marries **Sylvia Sidney**, which goes against his parole terms since parolees are not allowed to wed and therefore the marriage is not legal. *Sylvia is also a paroled penitentiary inmate, but Raft never knew that...*

When George Raft accidentally learns the truth he feels betrayed and their relationship is threatened. In a fit of disgust, Raft relapses to his old ways and organizes a gang of his ex-con friends to rob Carey' store...

REVIEW

Fritz Lang's only attempt at straight comedy comes off as being Runyonesque, though its more serious aim was to be a Brechtian moral lesson play. It also mixes in romance, drama, musical routines and a crime story. Lang dismissed it as a misfire. Even if that were true, which I don't believe is so unless you unfairly compare it to the acclaimed director's superb film noirs, the film is still marvelous because of the way it treats in such a realistic way its lead romantic couple. The film fascinates in the way it carries out a romantic duel between a couple who have very different points of view and spend much of the film locked in a struggle over them until they can see the light and change.

Raft's performance manifests a taste for restraint that's almost too stiff. It's a stoicism that doesn't quite blend in with the rest of it. Sidney's performance on the other side is competent in its earnestness to shield her past and not shatter the real amorous spark.

CONCLUSION

This film got so ill-received by film critics because it is simply out of step with Lang's previous darker mysterious films of more depth. But this light-hearted curio is likable anyway and its droll humour and the charming leads all work to its advantage, and with the passing of time appears to be far better than initially thought.