

***Some Came Running* (PG)**

2nd February 2009

Director: **Vincente Minnelli**
USA 1958

Running time : <136> minutes

LEADING PLAYERS: **Frank Sinatra** (Dave Hirsh), **Dean Martin** (Bama Dillert), **Shirley MacLaine** (Ginnie Moorehead), **Martha Hyer** (Gwen French), **Arthur Kennedy** (Frank Hirsh).

SCRIPT: **John Patrick, Arthur Sheekman** from the novel by **James Jones**. PHOTOGRAPHY: **William H. Daniels**.
EDITING: **Adrienne Fazan**. MUSIC: **Elmer Bernstein**.

Some Came Running is about a soldier returning from service in the armed forces during WWII to his hometown. There he perceives, with new clarity born of his experiences, the frustration and repression in American society, and struggles with the conflicting urges to respectability and indulgence of his vices. The soldier is played by Frank Sinatra.

This last detail, and the film's deployment of other big name actors, together with its inability to utter the 's' word owing to the self-censorship of the times, may well be a problem for some. There existed in the 50s a certain brand of melodrama in American cinema, typified by films like *A Place in the Sun* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, but also by the work of directors like Douglas Sirk (*Imitation of Life*) and Vincente Minnelli (*Home from the Hill*). These films wear their hearts on their sleeves stylistically speaking. The prosperity of the settings is palpable, often symbolised by the motor car, the décor is given scrupulous attention, as are the costumes and coiffure of the actors, and the music is often jazzy, down and dirty.

Some Came Running is like this. You must embrace the design of the movie even if the emotional truth of the script sometimes escapes you. Look for example at the climactic scene at a fairground, with lighting, colour, editing and cinemascope composition used in a heightened expressive manner. But I am getting ahead of myself.

The action is set in a modest Midwestern town (loosely based on the author's own Robinson, Illinois) and Dave Hirsh arrives with a floozy in tow (Shirley MacLaine in an early, rather over-determined performance that nevertheless earned her an Oscar nomination and a career of playing prostitutes) and a certain hell-raising past behind him (no need for method acting there, then). He has turned his hand to writing a few stories and is eyed ambivalently by the local professor's schoolteacher daughter (Hyer). At the same time he strikes up a semi-professional friendship with a

gambler in the shape of Dean Martin. The question is: should he yield to the void and fall back into his old ways, or allow himself to be saved by the love of a woman? And which? And how, if he doesn't love himself?

The book's author, Jones, had made it big with *From Here to Eternity*, filmed by Columbia Pictures to considerable success, and also with Sinatra in his first dramatic role. MGM fancied its chances at repeating the magic with this film, and indeed it did well both critically and commercially (tenth most successful film of the year).

Sinatra had had another strong dramatic role with Preminger's *The Man with the Golden Arm*, but for Martin this was a first, after a recent split from his screen partner Jerry Lewis. It's a great performance and an effortless one, fulfilling the promise of his almost-straight turn in Hawks's *Rio Bravo*.

But the chief reason for the film's revival, I suspect, is that it is another of those curios in the work of its director, an artist more commonly identified with his musicals, including *Gigi* which he made the same year. Admire the staging (the planning within the shot), the framing, the use of colour (it won't be incidental), and wallow in a fifty-year-old example of glossy Hollywood high art.

David Clare