William A. Seiter, who died in 1968 at the age of 69, probably never made what could be regarded as a "great" picture. But he maintained an amazingly high batting average through the 20's, 30's and 40's. He had astonishing versatility, ranging in the silents from the richly emotional "The Little Church Around the Corner" to Colleen Moore jazz-age comedies, and in the talkies from Shirley Temple's "Dimples" to musicals "Venus," "Roberta," melodramas ("The Case Against Krs Amses"), "This is my Affair" and war films ("Torture"). Warmth and charm, pace and zest were characteristics of all his films, as applicable as much to one of his 50's comedies with Eve Arden ("The Lady Wants Mink") as to the delightful mid-20's family comedy "Skimmer's Dress Suit." These characteristics are much in evidence in "Professional Sweetheart," with its theme - an irreverent spoof of commercial radio, and a scheme to marry off radio's "Purity Girl" to an "Anglo Saxon White Virgin" - and its cast of immigrants from the Warner lot - it seems to be heading for the field of hard-bitten satire best exemplified by "Blazed Front." Yet despite some very real dialogue that clearly identify it as a pre-Code movie, the film never quite becomes as tough as nails as it might be, thanks mainly to Seiter's deft taste which turns the manufactured romance into quite a touching and affecting real one. The plot has no real surprises, but somehow Seiter manages to make even the obvious seem logical. Everyone in the cast is an expert in his or her line (with Zasu Pitts rattling off some surprisingly eyebrow-raising dialogues), and Ginger Rogers, fetishingly attired much of the time in the lingerie so much the mode then, in fact, vivacious and very lovely. If only on the strength of the silent "Skimmer's Dress Suit" and the talkie "Sons of the Desert" - the best of all the Laurel & Hardy features - Seiter deserves to rank as one of the major comedy directors, and while "Professional Sweetheart" is hardly an important work, it certainly confirms his skill and lively sense of fun.

LEO MccARRY

MccARRY started in silents as a Laurel & Hardy writer, moved rather haltingly into early talkie features, and then suddenly hit his stride in comedy as diversified as the Marx Brothers' "Duck Soup," Eddie Cantor's "Roman Scandals," and Laughton's "Nagles of Red Cap." In "Make Way for Tomorrow," "Going my Way" he showed a fine flair for honest sentiment and emotion too, but his more recent films - "My Son John," "Satan Never Sleeps" - seemed entirely alien to the things he did best, and were and mistakes. In a recent issue of "Chahiers du Cinéma," Jean-Pierre Mocky wrote of himself (and especially to his admirers) by claiming exaggerated credit for the success of "Laurel & Hardy films, praising his worst pictures - and ignoring his best. Fortunately, his films remain to speak for him, and "Love Affair" is still one of his most enjoyable.

"LOVE AFFAIR" (Rko Radio, 1938) Produced and directed by MccARRY; screenplay by Delmer Daves & Donald Ogden Stewart from a story by MccARRY and Mildred Cram; Camera: Rudolph Mate; Editor: Edward Curtin & George Hively; music: Roy Webb With: Charles Boyer, Irene Dunne, Maria Ouspenskaya, Lee Bowman, Maurice Moscovitch Astrid Allwyn, Scottie Beckett, Joan Leslie, Tom Dugan, Frank Mcloody sr.

A romantic comedy, even the same producing company, an only a 5-year interval but what a world of difference between this typically late-30's film and the earlier one by Seiter! "Love Affair" is a trifle, the first half gay and witty, the second half emotional. In terms of film technique, it is often clumsy, yet it works all the time and often inexplicably, Irene Dunne's underplayed farewell to her. Ouspenskaya is a suddenly tender and poignant moment, as it would be in life, but as such moments rarely are in film. MccARRY, like Frank Borzage, has the knack of wringing genuine emotion from minor incidents, and never showing us quite how he does it. Nothing really happens in "Love Affair," especially by 1968 movie standards, but it is elegant and a treat. In this unreal but pleasant world, even Hollywood's supreme hatch (on film) Astrid Allwyn is likeable, and the corn and the syrup all pay off when handled with such sensitivity. The film hasn't been seen for a good many years, thanks to the 1957 remake, "An Affair to Remember." A good musical was, rather good Grant and Deborah Kerr were good follow-ups to Boyer and Dunne the same sweeping scenes were used over and over; the set was used. All it lacked was the brevity of the original: it was twice as wide as the first one, twice as colorful, and like all CinemaScope films went on too long. A final academic note: no less than four directors-to-be can be found in the production staff of "Love Affair."