

THE SHEEP HAS FIVE LEGS (1954)

Screen: Fernandel, Pere et Cinq Fils; He Plays All 6 in 'The Sheep Has Five Legs'

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BRITAIN may have its Alec Guinness, but France still has Fernandel to match against him in any sort of contest of comic talent anyone may care to call. And no better recent demonstration of the veteran French comedian's mighty skill can be had than his work in "The Sheep Has Five Legs," which opened at the Fine Arts yesterday.

Run up the glittering Tricolor and bang out the "Marseillaise"! Remember "The Well-Digger's Daughter," "Harvest" and "Un Carnet de Bal"! For not only is this latest picture the best with Fernandel in years, but it is probably the cleverest and most hilarious French comedy we've seen since the war.

That is a heap of commendation to be loading on one brazen film that bears such an outrageous title and has its star playing six delicious roles. But it merits every clanging syllable of it, right down to the last unpleasant word. This reviewer is still laughing fondly at the fantastic humors it unfolds.

Let's give a lot of credit for it to the stable of writers who contrived the collection of individual fables that make up the whole elaborate yarn. The series of tied-together stories of an old French vintner and his quintuplet sons who are assembled from the four corners of the earth for a family reunion are vignettes of bright conceit and charm. They are, indeed, the imaginings of unrestrained Gallic minds, tickled by quick-witted ideas and a lively inclination to have fun.

Let's credit, too, Henri Verneuil, who directed the whole thing in a style of nimble pictorial suggestion and sly, sometimes slightly bawdy farce.

But, certainly, the major share of credit for the crackle and snap in this film should go to Fernandel, whose talent for drawing comic characters is superb. Not one of the six assorted fellows—the father and his quintuplet sons—that he plays is like the others except in facial contour. And each has his own amusing mood.

The old man is crabby and explosive, outraged and unforgiving toward his sons who have not come back to see him since they were taken away as "national

monuments" to the state when infants. One son, a beauty parlor operator, is pompous and full of prissy airs. Another, a vagrant sea-captain, is darkly tempestuous and dour. The long scene in which this fellow plays a sort of roulette, with a fly as the critical determinant of fortune, is the funniest in the film. Charlie Chaplin's pantomimic exhibitions were seldom better than Fernandel's in this scene.

Another son is a soft-hearted "lonely hearts" columnist; another a village curé who has become a laughing stock in his town because he bears a strong resemblance to a famous movie star in a famous role. Yet another is a poor but happy family man whose life is shadowed by a greedy undertaker. The story of this last oppressed quintuplet is the most ambitious and intellectually droll. Fernandel's display of hypochondria under the spell of the undertaker is a scream. And his glee at discovering freedom when the undertaker dies first is a joy.

Others support the star expertly. De Funes as the slick undertaker and Delmont as the grown-up quint's godfather who gathers them together are particularly droll. But the picture is carried by Fernandel, who works harder than the rest of the cast rolled into one. We hope he was paid six salaries for this picture. He certainly earns them, every one.

THE SHEEP HAS FIVE LEGS, original screen play by Albert Valentin, based on stories by Jean Marsan, Henry Troyat, Jacques Perret, Henri Verneuil and Raoul Ploquin, and adapted by Rene Borjavel and Henri Verneuil; directed by Henri Verneuil, produced by Raoul Ploquin. A United Motion picture Organization Release, At the Fine Arts.

Papa Saint-Forget Fernandel
St. Forget Quintuplets: Alain, Bernard, Charles, Desire, Etienne Fernandel
Dr Bolene Delmont
Pilate—the Undertaker [Louis] De Funes
Desire's Wife Paulette Dubost
Marianne Francoise Arnoul
Mr. Brissard Noel Roquevert
Native Girl Lolita Lopez
Mayor Rene Genin