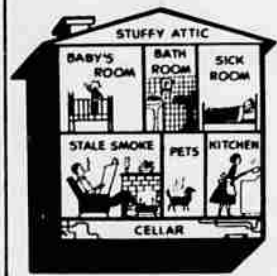


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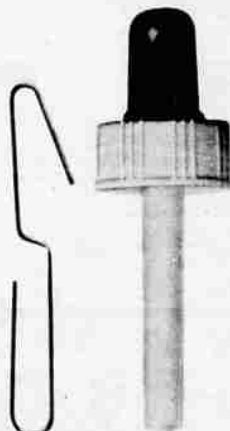
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MOVIES

Simone Signoret and Yves Montand:

America Discovers a Unique French Couple

She's so talented she might just upset tradition and win an Oscar, while her husband's so magnetic he even captivates audiences that can't understand him

By PEER J. OPPENHEIMER

IF SIMONE SIGNORET doesn't win an Oscar for her performance in 'Room at the Top,' I'll eat my hat," says Joe Pasternak.

Joe is not a publicist, not even a close friend of Simone, the French star whose refreshingly mature sex appeal has captivated American audiences. Pasternak is, however, one of Hollywood's shrewdest producers and often expresses the opinion of fellow workers.

He also may be a man about to learn how a hat tastes.

No matter how highly Miss Signoret is regarded by fans and professionals, she stands only an outside chance to grab an Oscar Monday night. That she is among the most deserving contenders, no one in Hollywood denies, but in the selection of the annual Academy Award winners there's a great deal of politics and publicity involved which can sway the vote for or against.

In Miss Signoret's case, it's mostly against. An Oscar is rarely awarded to a foreign film, and Simone's picture, "Room at the Top," was an English production.

Of course, "Room at the Top" also is the kind of picture that is usually shown only in metropolitan "art houses" and rarely makes money. Yet it has already grossed over \$3 million by being shown in almost every city in America with more than three theaters! So maybe there's still another tradition-smashing surprise coming for a surprising picture and its star.

Even Miss Signoret is somewhat baffled by her overnight success in America.

"I was sun-bathing on the Riviera a few months ago," says Simone, "when an American from Wichita, Kan., walked up to me to let me know how much he enjoyed me in 'Room at the Top.' I have been recognized by people who saw the film in towns I've never even heard of! This never happened when I appeared in French films which were shown in the United States, no matter how good the notices were."

At 39—she looks 35 and refers to herself as "fortyish"—Simone was no overnight success in France, where she had dreamed of becoming an actress since she was eight years old.

The dream remained a dream until 1940 when she found herself in occupied Paris, heading a household consisting of herself, her mother, and a brother. Her father had fled to England to fight for de Gaulle and the Allies. To help support the family, she became an extra in the film studios and began an unspectacular but steady climb to fame. In the past 20 years, she's made 16 pictures and won one French and three English equivalents of our Oscar.

TEN YEARS AGO, she was supposed to come to the United States for a contract with Howard Hughes. "It was a bit embarrassing," she admits with a smile, "because I never showed up, or even replied to his request. And now he lives in a bungalow adjoining ours!"

Simone still insists she has no ambition to become a big star, in the Hollywood