

ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

By LAWRENCE MORTON

A *Song To Remember* is a story about a Polish musician who came to Paris in 1831 to startle fashionable society with the brilliance of his talent, enjoy a brief but glorious career as artist and lover and patriot, and die, before his time, of dread consumption. It is quite incidental that this musician, his teacher and his mistress bore the respective names of Chopin, Elsner and George Sand. Obviously the producers of the film had no intention of making it a well documented biography, and I daresay that they could compile a longer list of factual inaccuracies than the critics who have been busily consulting all the biographers from Niecks to Guy de Pourtales in an effort to amass enough evidence to overwhelm the producers with a consciousness of the enormity of their crime. Such evidence, however, is quite beside the point. The disregard of biographical fact, like the technicolor photography and the extraordinarily beautiful sound recording, is a dramatic technic which serves to present a problem and work out its solution. The problem is the old one of the place of the artist in society. Beside the demonstration made by the picture, the clear presentation of this question, and the answer given, the degree of historic authenticity seems to me to fade into insignificance.

Objective Burma is another one of those wonderful war pictures where the simplicity of the story and the naturalness of the characters create the kind

of realism which is the main strength of a documentary. Added to that are the suspense and drama of a contrived screenplay. It is these latter qualities which made it possible for Franz Waxman to write the best musical score he has turned out to date, a score which successfully avoids the clichés of the Hollywood style and the even more tiresome clichés of the symphonic tradition.

The principal melodic material is a kind of *marche héroïque* used repeatedly throughout the film. As one would expect nowadays, it is of the Prokofiev-Shostakovitch persuasion and moves through several keys without benefit of modulation. It is amenable to variation, even to being set in a quasi-Oriental version doubtless intended to be Burmese.

But this is the least interesting aspect of the score. What is more impressive is the imaginative use of military flourishes, particularly in the percussion. The main-title makes wonderful use of the side-drum in a reiterated beat that warns you this is going to be a tough picture. And there is a very effective use of the snares at the point of a diminuendo. Tensions are carefully built up by silences, repeated single notes, and signal-like effects in the woods.

All of this is indicative of a move toward the creation of plastic musical forms which run parallel to what you see on the screen and have a continuity derived not so much from musical sequence and design as from the screen action. It makes for a far better inte-

gration of the aural and the visual, and at the same time it throws the composer right into the willing arms of "modernism." So far, Waxman is a little

timid in his embrace. But when one compares this score with his earlier ones, it becomes clear that he is at least courting a new mistress.

ON AND OFF BROADWAY

By S. L. M. BARLOW

THIS column will leave Broadway for the moment to dilate on Fifth Avenue and on Fifty-ninth Street and elsewhere, with a brief return to its proper beat.

The most stunning ballet on view at the moment is to be seen at the Metropolitan Museum, where Alan Priest has assembled hundreds of Imperial robes from the Forbidden City and arranged them in gallery after gallery with a cumulative dramatic effect that is breathtaking. The staging and lighting are remarkable: you pass through a guarded portal, along a procession, into an Audience, past a tomb, and into a theatre, where the Court is holding a Garden Party. And three hundred years of tapestry and embroidery shimmer, beckon, and move like stained-glass lights. The incredible continuity of one art alone is impressive — the wardrobes of ten emperors. But to the layman, it is the sheer theatrical effect that bowls one over.

Still in the Orient, but on Fifty-ninth Street, La Meri was at it again: this time with *Scheherazade*, done with her usual felicity of costume and lighting. She has followed the original story which Rimsky-Korsakov drew from *The Thousand and One Nights*, thereby illustrating rather than torturing the score. We see Sinbad, the Roc, the King of Al-Hind, the Zught, Princess Budur,

Jirjis, Prince Kalenda, and many more. In fact, the story is so various that the ballet lacks the concentration of La Meri's *Swan Lake*. But for all that it is good to see an essentially Oriental story done with the proper *mudras* of gesture and movement. There is humor and poetry and surprise.

In the thirteenth precinct, at the National Arts Club, they have begun again the series of ancient music, presented without any affectation or artiness, using the best performers (Ben Stad and the Society of Ancient Instruments; Yves Tinayre; the Greater New York Chorus under Edgar Varese) and covering a lovely and neglected period. The last concert ran from early dances and songs, through Arresti and Scarlatti and Dowland to Mozart and Bach — all in the able hands of C. J. Chiasson (Sgt. 1st class and harpsichordist) and Isabel French. And the drum should be beaten regularly for those two remarkable scores discovered and produced by Yves Tinayre: the *Motetto di Requiem* of Alessandro Scarlatti (probably composed in memoriam for Mary Queen of Scots) and the *Kirchenkantate* by J. C. Kriedel (1640-1710).

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I have seen three versions of *Frankie and Johnny* this year. The best one is the unexpurgated volume edited and illustrated by John Held Jr. The wood-