

Norman Lloyd. (Also, for the record, *The Heart Remembers*, with music by Lukas Foss, and *Daddy was a Fireman*, with music by Herbert Haufreucht. These I did not see.) *On My Mother's Side* is entirely delightful. In a set of brief portraits, Weidman presents the older generations (Aunt Jessie who sang *Little Buttercup* with Raymond Hitchcock; great-grandfather Hoffman, who settled down; another who settled up by hanging himself; a blind grandmother and others) each vividly presented by some salience of character, through motions inventive and personal. Altogether an expert and entertaining performance. And *Inquest* is a knock-out. Doris Humphrey has taken a sombre story of a poor cobbler's family, dying of starvation (based on an inquest held in England, 1865) and developed it as concisely as possible, with a minimum of movement, and with a narrator, like a Greek Chorus. Then, when the tale is told, the real ballet begins, for then the survivors of the horror and the towns-

folk who have seen and heard begin to consider the implications of what has gone before; and this second half is the human cry of anguish, the bitter commentary, the welling sense of injustice and revolt, the little by little surge of protest, and the final rush to batter at the door of Justice. It is superb and moving, and, with the greatest economy and at the same time intensity, brings home its charges, the same charges implicit in *No for an Answer*. Both Humphrey and Weidman are wholly admirable in this bleak fatality, as are all the company.

Pearl Primus, at the Kaufmann Auditorium, was really all that I had been led to expect. Her first *African Ceremonial Dance* is by far the most impressive, matriarchal primitive expression I have seen. And all her interpretations, often to recitation or song, had variety and power. Of her accompaniments, I preferred that of the drummers, Cimber and Koker, artists in the best vaudevilian tradition.

ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

By LAWRENCE MORTON

HOLLYWOOD'S commercial product during the past few months has provided hardly anything of interest to musicians. It has been the familiar story of old paths stubbornly pursued, past successes relied upon, well-tried devices refurbished, ancient formulas reaffirmed, imagination suppressed, opportunities missed. There can be genuine satisfaction only with the highly developed technics in orchestration and recording, which remain the most de-

pendable virtues of film music. But one can no longer be astonished by these. The excellence of Robert Russell Bennett's arrangements for *Lady In The Dark* could have been forecast, and of course they proved to be, as one expected, superior in skill and taste to anything that has been turned out for similar pictures. But pickings are meager indeed when one must single out for distinction such minutiae as echo-chamber recording for music that Gin-

ger Rogers hears subconsciously, and a surrealist version of the wedding-march. Kurt Weill's music, what there is of it, is a full-blown concession to patterns established long ago for musical comedy success. Jerome Kern's score for *Cover Girl* is good enough, the product of habit and relaxed effort. Gene Kelly, an able runner-up to Fred Astaire, does a fine and imaginative shadow dance which has some relationship to what one might euphemistically call the character-plot complex of the film. It offered a real opportunity for some fine and imaginative music, but it got only the usual treatment — a heavily larded orchestration of a pop tune. *The Phantom Lady* explored a familiar situation from the viewpoint of the amateur psychologist. Its score was notable only for its intelligent use of le jazz hot in an exciting sequence where a jam session was woven into the actual structure of the plot and propelled it into a highly dramatic climax.

Earthquakers is a short film produced by the Army Air Force. It is a technicolor record of the achievements of a bomber squadron in the Tunisian campaign. The picture falls into two sections: the first, dominated by the voice of the commentator, establishes the North African locale, with information about geography, climate, history and inhabitants; the second records a successful bombing mission over enemy territory, with sound-effects of whirling propellers, falling bombs and bursting flak.

As in the standardized Hollywood product, no satisfactory solution has been found for the problem of balancing one element of sound-track against another. Having no confidence in the

ability of the camera to tell a story, the commentator must repeat for us on the verbal level the very things that the camera tells on the visual level. We need not be told that we are watching boys from Santa Monica or Coney Island sporting in the surf of the blue Mediterranean; we see that. And when we have just watched a half-dozen planes make safe landings on their return from the bombing mission, we need not be told that the seventh is making a crash landing because its landing gear has been shot away; we see that. But here the forms of radio commentary have been identified with the forms of film commentary. What ought to be brief and intermittent talk becomes a constant flow of solemn prose.

The net result is that Gail Kubik's score exists on that plane of just perceptible audibility where it cannot perform its proper function. I heard a main-title, a bit of quasi-oriental desert music, a few bars of a battle sequence that was quickly obliterated by an airplane propeller, a chorale-like passage near the end, and a final peroration. Thematically the score appeared to have two main ideas, a trumpet fanfare and a broad, heroic, Shostakovich-like melody, with a portion of the latter transformed into the desert music. All was of vigorous and contemporary quality. I wish I could have heard more of it.

Memphis Belle (also in technicolor, also with a Kubik score) is an enlargement of *Earthquakers*, with the scene transferred to Britain and with the focus set especially on the crewmen of a particular bomber, scheduled to return to America with the completion of this, their twenty-fifth mission. Here the emotions of the audience are more in-

volved than in the African film, and one would have expected the music to express a personal concern with the men, their danger, the tension they must have experienced. But the score might have been written for some other purpose altogether, so carefully does it maintain a coldly objective attitude. A composer's desire to avoid a too literal imitation of the screen is understandable and laudable. But much of this music seems to me to be irrelevant, specifically in the scenes where bombs are being fused and loaded, where the ground crews are awaiting the return of the squadron, and most especially when the Memphis Belle returns, late but safe. The composer might have allowed himself to be a little happier about this happy ending.

III

Frank Capra's deeply moving film, *The Negro Soldier*, preaches a more solemn and timely sermon than many Americans would willingly admit need-

ing. The text is from *Mein Kampf*, a passage which degrades the Negro to a subanthropoid status. The sermon disproves the Nazi race theory by reviewing briefly the history of the Negro in the building of America, in war and in peace, with a modest accounting of his accomplishments and his contributions to our national life. There is no talk of the intolerance, the inequality of opportunity, segregation or any of the oppressive practices which have kept the Negro in partial slavery in America. There are no complaints. There is only one enemy — Fascism. That many of our leading exhibitors have declined to show the film must be counted as an acknowledgment of a sense of shame. Capra's picture speaks more eloquently for true democracy than all the highly advertised accomplishments of those exhibitors in war-time activities that call forth a much noisier patriotism.

The musical score for the film is negligible.

IN THE THEATRE

By PAUL BOWLES

ANOTHER old operetta on the list of the New Opera Company's offerings is *Helen Goes to Troy*. By not even intimating that either the vehicle or the production is anything but the toughest kind of field-corn, this one manages not to be offensive. That is if one can accustom one's eyes to the hideousness of the visual spectacle, which is, after all, probably no more unbeautiful than any table of prize lampshades and vases at a Luna Park shooting gallery.

Humor in wartime, like many other things, has a tendency to revert to its less subtle manifestations. The only moment of the concerted romp which seemed amusing in a distraught way was Massine's *Procreation Dance*, where the studied gaga quality was heightened by emphasis on Truex and Novotna, neither of whom danced a step and simply swayed clumsily back and forth like two people busy at charades.

For me, Novotna was the whole show. At last she was done up to look