

tains a baroque, brutal story with just the right nuances. It has verve, movement, power when needed, and a conspicuous use and invention of fine melody. Well built, personal, it is perhaps the most satisfactory work that Menotti has given us.

In the record of deserved credits: Alexander Smallens, George Schick, and Boris Kogan were the accomplished

conductors, and had an excellent orchestra to lead. Moncion (a San Domingan) and Guelis (from the Paris Opera) were real finds. And Cordoba (Duane), Patterson, Geleznova, and some other old friends were the pivots upon which this new ensemble turned. It has real possibilities; and I wish them all a Happy New Year.

ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

BY LAWRENCE MORTON

CONDUCTING this column during the late 'thirties, George Antheil began by writing happily about the "more and more respectable creative field" that the cinema was opening up to the serious composer. Film music, he found, was on the upgrade. Hollywood was no longer afraid of the dissonant music that he and Werner Janssen were writing. The best American composers would soon be taken into the industry, just as Honegger had been, and Auric and Milhaud and Walton and Shostakovich. Film opera was imminent, and there was talk about assignments for Schönberg and Stravinsky.

By the next season, Antheil's enthusiasm had been dulled: Korngold had won an Academy Award. The Schönberg rumor had been reduced to a Krenek rumor which materialized in the engagement of Kurt Weill for a pair of films. Nothing was found for Stravinsky — it was doubted if he had a real sense of theatre. The general run of Hollywood music, Antheil wrote, was disappointing, and it was time for music

critics to turn their searchlights on this situation.

But still there was hope: there was Walt Disney and there was radio. Not all motion pictures were being made in Hollywood. Thomson, Revueletas, Blitzstein, the Russians and the French were turning out significant scores. Film music as a medium still had vast potentialities.

Antheil could be writing the same lines today, for the situation is not much different. Going from one movie to another, in search of a fresh and interesting score, you ride the Antheil pendulum between hope and disappointment. You learn that an *American Romance* has a score by Gruenberg. But once in the theatre, you hear a potpourri of styles, idioms and scoring methods which make you wonder; and after inquiry you find out that "Gruenberg" is a collective name for a half-dozen contributors who had been called to rework large sections of Gruenberg's score which, for any one of a dozen possible reasons, had proved unsatisfactory. Then

you read the rave reviews on *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* and figure that a film with such a great emotional impact must have an equally powerful score. But you hear no more than some wisps of background music, some juicy treatments of *My Wonderful One*, a lot of marches in semi-symphonic versions.

You hear that *Fighting Lady* is one of the great documentaries of the war, the equal, if not the superior, of *Memphis Belle*. It is in technicolor and it has Robert Taylor as commentator. It is exciting, extraordinarily beautiful, and deeply moving. But in spite of almost incalculable musical opportunities, it has been given a score as plain as a news-reel's. Marches predominate, and not very good ones at that. For a picture of such terrible beauty, a Beethoven would not have been too good a composer. And there are plenty of Hollywood men who would at least have made an attempt to pour into such a score some of the picture's tension, the waiting and the fighting and the dying that are daily routine on an aircraft carrier.

And so you trek from theatre to theatre. You see *Laura*, a better than average murder-mystery with a better than average theme song (cf. Vernon Duke) subjected to a variety of treatments which emphasize the Park Avenue setting and morality. It is a score heavily laden with competence. But there is plenty of this kind of virtue in Hollywood scores. In varying degrees you hear this same competence in the scores of *The Very Thought of You*, *Since You Went Away*, *I'll Be Seeing You*, *Meet Me In St. Louis* and a host of others.

You hope for better in a picture like the Russian film, *The Rainbow*. But when you see the credit card of Lev

Schwartz you know that you are going to hear an inept imitation of Hollywood. And your worst fears are confirmed in the childbirth scene, where delivery is accompanied by a sunrise and a musical crescendo topped by a choir of angel voices. It is the vision scene of *Bernadette*, corrupted. For the rest of the picture there are the usual marches and military flourishes, the usual folksongs and the usual symphonic clichés which, of all the symbols of bourgeois romanticism, alone seem to have been granted survival in the new Soviet state. Kabalevsky's music for *Shors*, another great Russian film classic, seems even less satisfactory now than it did at first hearing five years ago. You could use either one of these scores for *1812*, another Soviet epic which has nothing musical of its own to recommend it.

Finally you go to see the film on the liberation of Paris, which Pierre Blanchard brought with him from France last month. There is no musical score at all; the sound-track carries only sound-effects and the stirring voice of Charles Boyer as commentator. It was a relief and a joy to watch a film without the little warming flame that supposedly gives life to the screen.

Amidst all this encircling gloom, there are a few kindly lights. Bernard Herrmann has written a piano concerto for *Hangover Square*. In this picture, composers will be delighted to see their profession represented by Laird Cregar as a murderer who tosses his victim into a bonfire. This is a decided improvement over the musician-type brought to the screen by Boyer, Taylor, Laughton, Garfield and others. But what is more important, a filmed musician has at long last been given a respectable piece of

music to compose during his ten-reel career. Herrmann's concerto is a bona fide concerto, even though it is brief. It is written in a frankly romantic vein, with plenty of showy passages and broad melodies which the left hand can set off with arpeggios and runs. But it also has the kind of musical integrity which comes from honest tunes skillfully developed. The general scheme of the piece is ternary: a pair of tunes are first set forth, both of them rather *appas-*

sionata; then a 6/8 allegro develops the first tune at length; and there is a coda-like recapitulation. Roughly, the over-all manner is Shostakovich's, but without the Russian's grotesqueness and verbosity. Musicians will respect the piece for its structure, its authority and its vitality. Audiences should like it for its tunes and its style. As Hollywood would say, "It's not only good, it's commercial."

OVER THE AIR

By CHARLES MILLS

THE Boston Orchestra under Koussevitsky gave a beautiful performance over the Blue of Bela Bartok's *Concerto For Orchestra*. This was a successful radio premiere, fresh, exciting and possibly the most attractive work, from the standpoint of wide appeal, that Bartok has yet done. The strong, lyric first movement, often severe and even stern in sound, is far from compromising in attitude, but in spiritual essence it has real integrity, and communicates an imaginative, almost exotic form of folk mood, free of banality and chauvinism. There is some wonderful brass writing in this movement; stark naked, fierce and bleak, its positive rhythms have symmetry. Melodic writing based on intervals of fourths can be as trite and obvious as twelve-tone scale abuses if badly managed, but Bartok has created passages that have a strong, cantando-like breath and grandeur in a very personal and original way. The second movement is a delightful little joke, scored with fantastic instrumental

color, handled throughout with a light finger and sparkling wit. A certain extravagance is inevitable in such a mixed and varied palette, employing all orchestral colors most of the time. Happily the effect here is right for the spirited exuberance of the piece. The third movement, which Bartok calls a "lugubrious death-song," is a shimmering poem, lit by exact, highly crystallized harmonies, their quiet stillness periodically broken by vague, melodic stirrings and certain fragmentary curiosities of motion and color. It is a masterpiece of delicate reticence. The fourth movement, a kind of miniature Hungarian rhapsody, is composed of striking dance-like materials whose energy and zest are only surpassed in the fifth and final part, a brilliant peasant festival that utilizes every available orchestral source. The concerto, cast in a classic mold, is more or less a structural descendant of the Brandenburg forms, but the net result is a kind of expressionistic, neo-romantic impressionism.