vish effect. When well danced the Queen has just such a quality, she soars through space regally and yet seems malign.

ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

By LAWRENCE MORTON

BERNARD SHAW had a right to snicker at Lilian Nordica when she turned Elsa of Brabant into Elsa of Bond Street by wearing a corset. And we have a right to snicker and guffaw when Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* arrives on the screen looking for all the world like a Cecil B. DeMille extravaganza. The film was doubtless intended to be a denial to the world that Britain had been impoverished by the war, an affirmation that if the United States would not finance His Majesty's Government with a loan, the British film industry could. The cast, deeply conscious of its responsibility for bringing to life a Shavian script, delivers each line with an almost choreographic eloquence, as if it were an epigram being engraved on Bartlett's deathless tablets. Vivien Leigh's Cleopatra is a kind of mechanized Shirley Temple; and by the end of the picture she is far from being the queen Caesar hoped he had made of her, still farther from being the woman Mark Anthony will expect when he arrives in Egypt, and hardly more than a mouthpiece of the character Shaw thought to create in two hours of unmitigated brilliance. Claude Rains is somewhat better; but spending himself in rendering unto Shaw the things that are Shaw's, he has very little left to render unto Caesar.

Part and parcel of this sumptuous but shallow production is the score of Georges Auric. It begins with a modest and dignified unison passage bespeaking a proper humility in the presence of the Great Name of Shaw. A few bars of this suffice, however; and as Technicolor takes over, the music, not to be outdone, swings into a grandioso section heavily bejeweled with finger exercises for the woods and harp. Set to a livelier rhythm, the whole would serve nicely for the main-title of an MGM musical. Actually, it introduces us to a little crap game in the courtyard of Cleopatra's palace. This scene of barracks domesticity is interrupted by some horse-racing music that serves to bring front and center a bearer of evil tidings: Caesar's legions are only an hour away. There is much to-do over this dire announcement, much running hither and thither; Auric wisely leaves the sound-track in possession of screaming women. But a night scene on the desert recalls him to his task, and with infinite patience he weaves an elaborate pattern of string glissandi and harmonics with which to evoke the infinite mystery of night and stars and the beyond. But hark! the noble and melancholy notes of a horn break the stillness, and a solitary figure

emerges from a tent. It moves silently out toward the desert night. And now Caesar (for it is he) addresses the Sphinx, who just happened to be resting in the vicinity. His long soliloquy is answered by a woman's voice, and Cleopatra emerges from the shadows of the beast. Meanwhile Auric has retired to prepare for his next chore. This turns out to be a fiddle solo, *con tenerezza,* for the scene ends with the implication of an understanding between the girl-queen and the Roman gentleman whose identity, I need hardly tell you, has not yet been made known to her. The fiddle music is also a bridge that links the fade-out on the desert to the next scene, an interior shot of the palace. Now the atmosphere is set by one of those banal little solo tunes that the composer had saved from the early days of Les Six. It underlines at once the devastating cleverness of Caesar, the overplayed immaturity of Cleopatra, and the now-apparent inability of the whole picture-making crew, from producer to grip, to elevate the production above the level of expensive vaudeville. But no matter: the ensuing scene, in which Caesar begins to indoctrinate Cleopatra with the rules of queenship, is as trite as the music forecast. Now Caesar's identity is revealed by a carefully rehearsed "Heil" from a platoon of guards who providentially enter the palace at the very moment that the first lesson in queenship ends. Cleopatra is inundated with emotion at the revelation, and she embraces Caesar impulsively while the orchestra swells into a surging climax such as Strauss might have written for a first-act curtain.

There is more of this kind of stuff, most of it thickly textured and surefire commercial. There is some morning music that harks back to the third-act prelude of *Butterfly.* One of Cleopatra's slaves (an early pupil of Satie's, no doubt) plays a kind of *Gymnopédie* for harp. A luxurious banquet scene evokes a grateful reference to that unfailing fountainhead of musical orientalism, The Five. Cleopatra's boat-ride across the harbor gets its little Italianate barcarolle; and though the scene is photographed in long-shot, its music has the presence of Melchior singing in his bathroom. Add to all this some mob and battle music, a triumphal sequence, a generous use of solo instruments which call attention to the music when it ought to be neutral, a heavy sprinkling of chromatics, a few mickey-moused sequences – and you discover that even a French composer, given a big enough budget, can forget to be Gallic, simple, spontaneous, clear, elegant. He can be as bombastic as a Middle European romanticist.

Another Auric score for another British film, *Dead Of Night,* is less bombastic but equally heavy-textured and impressionistic. In addition, it is so badly recorded, so deficient in "highs," that you almost wonder if there are any treble instruments in the orchestra. Listening to the score a second time brings only one real reward – some very macabre funeral music for a hallucination scene. The film deserves but does not need better, for it is a noteworthy achievement in the category of horror pictures. It is so absorbing dramatically that the music can be ignored, allowed to

work its magic, if any, without benefit of the audience's consciousness.

Perhaps one should not be too hard on Auric for his labors at Elstree and Teddington. The alternative appears to be the kind of thing that Hubert Bath has done for *They Were Sisters.* This is the stuff that soap-operas are made on, and it gives James Mason another opportunity to play a Byronic hero. Mr. Bath's music stems directly from the 1920 cue sheets by Roberts, Reisenfeld and Axt. There are at least a half-dozen romanzas, a few airs de ballet, a scène dramatique, all of them so constructed that the orchestra inevitably finds itself sitting on a diminished chord at scene's end. This is particularly effective when accompanied by a harp arpeggio.

III

One Hans Haug has the sole music credit in *Portrait of a Woman,* a French picture made by Jacques Feyder in Switzerland in 1943, with Françoise Rosay in a multiple role. This is, again, the world of the small-budget film. It required Mr. Haug to be modest; but instead he was stingy, not only in the amount and size of the music, but in invention as well. The longest musical sequence, for the unhappy teacher's walk through her deserted school, is hardly more than a series of chords with neither linear nor harmonic interest. Somehow it reaches a climax, fortissimo, in the upper registers of all the instruments. But it is reached much too soon, and Mr. Haug can think of nothing better than to repeat the same chord over and over again until the scene fades.

It is at this point, after having spent many hours with foreign films, that Hollywood and its music seem not to be so bad after all.

OVER THE AIR

By CHARLES MILLS

JACQUES de Menasce's *Second Piano Concerto* received a brilliant American premiere over CBS, with Jacques Abrams as soloist and Bernard Herrmann conducting the Columbia Orchestra. This proved to be especially effective on the air for its elegant clarity, streamlined patterns and subtle orchestral inventions. Throughout the four compact movements the serious content is projected with a well-sustained wit and a sensitive charm, comparable in more lyric moments to the finesse of Berg. The opening Allegro is scored with vigorous energy. The middle movements, *Cortège* and *Minuet Variations,* have a processional-like dignity and grace. The finale, based on a Hebrew tune sung during the Passover, moves with a slow intensification of pianistic force to a formidable expression of strength in the coda.

The anuual CBS concert under League of Composers' sponsorship opened with Robert Ward's *Jubilation, an Overture,* a work of sustained motion, bright lyrical passages