

demic in character but in the better sense of the word. Formally the composition is a little too four-square, sectional and jointed in design, but this is greatly offset by vague, illusive harmonies and distinctive melodic and rhythmic treatment of the theme.

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ABC offered an interesting program

with Roy Harris as conductor and composer. After doing an excellent job on Bach and Mozart, Harris interpreted his own compositions: the second movement from his *Fifth Symphony*, one of his best slow movements, and *Play Hour*, a charming piece, of zest and wit, from his more recent *Memories of a Child's Sunday*.

## ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

By LAWRENCE MORTON

THE brilliance and wit of Ben Hecht's dialogue make *Specter of the Rose* appear to be a great film. Certainly it is no assembly-line product; it is custom-built from beginning to end. It has a thousand virtues, but every virtue has its antithesis in some salient defect. Smartness and sophistication are countered by snobishness, keenness of intellect by a contempt for the passions that move men. The artistic frequently becomes phony, and skill becomes mere virtuosity. The story is a genuine tragedy but it engenders no compassion because it is peopled by caricatures. The impresario, Polikoff, is an actor's role, a receptacle for droll stories that might have been told about Diaghilev, De Basil and Hurok. Judith Anderson promenades through the picture bearing the ridiculous name of La Sylph and giving the role of the faded ballerina an aura of travesty. The dancer Sasine, vaguely modeled after Nijinsky, is afflicted with a psychological malady so complicated, both in its manifestations and in its analysis by the other characters of the

play, that he achieves only the kind of reality that the Einstein formula has for the man-on-the-street: both are comprehensible only in terms of the disasters they provoke. There is no genuine humor; it is mostly of the perverse kind that takes for its objects the economic insecurity of artists and musicians. In short, *Specter of the Rose* is a tour de force of cynicism.

George Antheil's score is the perfectly wedded mate for Hecht's script. It has none of the charm and buoyancy that one would expect from the bad boy of music. It has no real drama, since there is nothing on the screen to inspire drama, even to justify it. It maneuvers the formulas of ballet music just as Hecht maneuvers the superficialities of his characters. The score emerges as a symposium of waltzes with occasional excursions into concerto-like piano passages, a polka and a few other dance patterns. In style, it is a potpourri of Ravel, Rachmaninov, Strauss, Prokofiev and others and the adaptation of these styles is so consciously worked at and so plainly exposed to the ear that it

must be regarded as frankly satirical. Infected thus by the Hecht virus, Antheil speaks almost not at all in his own voice. When he does, as in the brief ballet music for the three young dancers who come to La Sylph's studio to apply for jobs, it is in the bright dissonant style that has become familiar in the composer's recent works.

The avoidance of the Weber music for the ballet is thus logically sound. With its sweetness of sentiment, clarity of form and general feeling of good health, it would have been anomalous in the film. What Antheil has substituted for it is just what the script requires — a waltz of somewhat turgid feeling, emotionally decadent and endlessly repetitive, as if it had a first ending but no second. It moves continuously nowhere, accumulating the physical weariness that the rehearsal pianist knows after a session at La Sylph's, as well as the emotional frustration that brings the hero to the final catastrophe.

### III

*Henry V* is everything that enthusiasts have claimed it to be; and if one were able to understand the lines given in Irish, Welsh and Cockney accents by the comic characters of the play, it would be as close to perfection in film drama as has yet been achieved.

It is a spectacular picture; and yet it is not the spectacle which impresses one nearly so much as the high purpose that the spectacle serves. This is particularly true of Walton's beautiful score. It is not outstanding in the sense of distracting one's attention from the screen or the spoken word; neither is it subservient. It is like the

spoke of a wheel, the arch of a cathedral, one of the premises of a syllogism. It performs with distinction all its functional duties. It has real presence in the charming entr'actes for the Globe Theatre scenes, in the fanfares and drum rolls for scenes of royal splendor, in the chanting of the mass at Southampton. It plays subtly on the consciousness of the spectator, summoning his imagination to the performance of extraordinary feats perhaps even more effectively than do the noble and hortative lines of the chorus. It shifts the spectator from England to France as gently and as surely as do the settings, the costumes and the very movement of the camera.

The musical characterization of the two geographical areas is, in fact, one of Walton's noteworthy accomplishments in this score. His English music is solidly in the tradition of Purcell and Dowland and Holst and Vaughan Williams — if one can call that broken line a tradition. Without leaning too heavily on folk elements, Walton's accent is as English as Chaucer's. The France of Charles VI and the contemptible Dauphin is just as convincingly characterized in sound. One would think that Walton had been born to the tradition that runs from Rameau to Roussel. Milhaud himself could not have spoken in a more Gallic idiom. He might even have written some of the most characteristic passages of the score.

In point of techniques and methods, Walton is a conservative craftsman. He seems to be less ambitious than most American film composers for opportunities to exploit his art. Scored in Hollywood, the film would

undoubtedly have had more music. One wonders what would have happened to the tenderly humorous scene of love-making. Where Walton does use music, he writes unobtrusively and with a seemly reticence. His underscoring is modest and sensitive. But when the sound track is cleared for a major musical effort, Walton is quite prepared to abandon "modest stillness and humility . . . stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood." His battle music, beginning with the

march of the French cavalry, accelerating to a gallop and finally reaching a tremendous climax in the clash of arms, is a sequence of surpassing splendor and excitement. It is not only pictorial, in the manner of Prokofiev's famous *Battle on the Ice* from *Nevsiky*; it refuses to be circumscribed by a framework of brutality; it flows over into the same heroic emotional areas where Shakespeare found the words and sentiments for Henry's great speech before Harfleur.

## IN THE THEATRE

By S. L. M. BARLOW

AT one of those Sunday lunches on Long Island recently a Rumanian delegate asked me if I had read Robinson Jeffers' *Medea*, and a dowager leaned across the table and said, "O, that's the play I saw at the Century where the man marries his mother . . ." I had hoped that the Old Vic was making more impression than that, for most of our producers and actors could, and undoubtedly did, profit from a visit to our visitors.

When Sada Yakko, the great Japanese tragedienne, acted at one of the early Paris Expositions, Coquelin insisted that all the members of the Théâtre Français go to see her and to study. (The language difference was somewhat greater than at the Old Vic where only a few of the actors and none of the actresses escaped local and often barbarous accents. I counted four pronunciations of the word "Shrewsbury" in the first five

minutes of *Henry IV*, part two.) It is not a question of going to scoff and remaining to pray, for there are at least two companies now on Broadway—I would select *The Glass Menagerie* and *I Remember Mama*—where the producing and acting are as fine. It is a question of observing other individualities and other methods of team-work; a course of sprouts which the United Nations are undertaking and which the world needs.

The music of the Old Vic partook of the general competence. To begin with the orchestra was good, and admirably led by Herbert Menges, with discretion and accent. His own music for Shakespeare was effective; and the selections he made, mostly from Handel, of music contemporary with Sheridan formed a delicious background to *The Critic*. Anthony Hopkins is a young British composer, best known to date for radio and movie scores. His music for *Oedipus*