

ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

By LAWRENCE MORTON

HOLLYWOOD has never wavered in its affection for the high romance of the costume-drama. This season's crop, beginning with *Spanish Main* and *Captain Kidd*, now yields *The Bandit of Sherwood Forest*, wherein the son of Robin Hood (alias Chopin) leads the Merry Men to triumph over the wicked Regent who has a mind to revoke Magna Charta and set himself up as a fascist dictator. As motion pictures go, this one has a stale taste and musty odor, but it is a juicy plum for Hugo Friedhofer, and he has composed a seventy-minute score of real musical merit.

Hugo Friedhofer is perhaps better known as an orchestrator than as a composer although he was writing scores as long ago as *Marco Polo*. He has developed skill and versatility in the manipulation of the orchestra, and also a severely critical attitude toward film music. It is this attitude that directs him, as a composer, to avoid at any cost the clichés which abound in Hollywood's music. The cost, as it turns out, is not too dear—nothing more than reliance upon his own musical inventiveness. This appears to be a rich and dependable source. In it he has found such a charming melody as the theme for the lovers, with its suggestion of the Lydian mode, as well as a very noble and gentle theme associated with the Queen. For the Merry Men there is a characteristic 6-8 tune of English

flavor with a flatted seventh. All of this, and much more besides, is of good quality; and in the working of it one finds the kind of musicianship that sets Friedhofer (together with a few of his colleagues) apart from the men who wear the strict Hollywood label.

He writes bass lines that move with a purpose, voice parts that really lead somewhere. You hear them gratefully, for instance, in the end-title music where the themes of the lovers and the Queen are made into a chorale-like finale. There is musical integrity (no padding) in some of the lengthy episodes, such as the main-title music, with its forthright and simple statement of the theme of the Merry Men; the duel between young Robin and Friar Tuck, with the humorous interpolation of the *Dies Irae*; and the big duel between Robin and the Regent, with its Hindemithian textures and harmonies. The composer of this music is no isolationist. He is thoroughly aware of what is going on, now, in the whole musical world around him.

Notable besides the purely musical aspects of the score is its correctness for the film. In Hollywood this is a much more common virtue than real musicality. It is present, for instance, in Max Steiner's music for *San Antonio*. Here, however, the virtue is attenuated by the composer's use of musical illustration, a technique which gives us sliding-down-the-

banister music, walking-across-the-plaza music, telegraph, monkey and throwing-bric-a-brac music. This is no substitute for real invention, even when heard in the spacious luxuriance of Warner Brothers' incomparable recording. There was a degree of dramatic justness, again, in Hanns Eisler's score for *Spanish Main*. This suited the picture well enough, but only in the most general and mechanical way. And it did not suit the composer at all. Grudgingly – and the grudge is apparent – he gave himself over to an old-fashioned idiom, certainly abandoned in all his other music and frequently anathematized by him in speech and in print, as wanting in freshness and originality. The score is wholly without enthusiasm for the picture, without vitality and without the grand sweep of the drama. And so it appears insincere, although this is difficult to accept if one remembers that the same studio, with the same composer and the same music department, produced *None But The Lonely Heart* only a year ago.

In a completely different way there was dramatic validity in Werner Janssen's music for *Captain Kidd*.

Janssen sketched his score in the lightest possible manner, leaving lots of white space and then probably erasing half of what he had put down. He depended less upon formally constructed music than upon sounds and timbres like flutter-toned trumpets, ostinatos, strings pizzicato or in high harmonics. What there was of music (besides the unresourceful use of *Fingal's Cave* for the main-title) was an astounding mixture of atonal passages, whole-tone sequences, fragments of *Rule, Britannia* and *Westminster Chimes*, and apparently anything else that popped into Janssen's head – all of it badly recorded and insensitively dubbed. In spite of all this, and whether or not it was so intended, the score frequently gave us a kind of psychological insight, its method being pin-point accentuation and a rather weird commentary from the side-lines. If this was an intentional technique, it still needs vigorous development. And if Janssen does develop it, he will be my candidate for the scoring of pictures like *Spellbound* and *The Lost Weekend*, in which Miklos Rozsa seems to have missed the point completely.

THE TORRID ZONE

By COLIN McPHEE

IT is not because of any fixation on the early New Orleans style that I found the playing of Bunk Johnson's band at the Stuyvesant Casino so satisfying, but because of the simple integrity of the music, the

absence of any pretentiousness or confusion of styles. Bunk, although in his sixties, still plays with that indefinable exuberance and exaltation which are the heart and soul of trumpet, the kind of fervor you hear in Louis Arm-