

played out in the corridors and compartments of expresses thundering through the night to improbable Ruritanian destinations. But *Berlin Express* was for the most part filmed in Europe—in Paris, Frankfurt and Berlin—with (as the credits are careful to point out) the sanction of the British, United States and Soviet armies of occupation. And for the sake of the backgrounds it is worth having a look at.

The story is cold meat—there is the statesman travelling incognito with his attractive secretary (Paul Lukas and Merle Oberon), the ingenuous young American (Robert Ryan), and the routine assortment of sinister characters, half of whom eventually prove to be bad eggs, and half Grade I Export Quality. There is the conventional attempted assassination which doesn't come off, the kidnapping (which does), and the final rough-house and rescue. And to bring the cast up-to-date there are representatives of the three major Occupying Powers among the goodies.

The film strove valiantly to carry a message, but got into rather complicated intellectual difficulties towards the end and one was left with the curious impression that all would be right with the world if only Miss Oberon could get a seat on the Council of Foreign Ministers. As a picture of post-bellum Germany, however, the film has an atmosphere of ghastly actuality. At one point the camera swings in a panoramic shot to take in most of the central area of Frankfurt and the scene is one of unrelieved devastation. There is not, so far as the eye can see, a solitary undamaged building—not even a building that looks habitable. Nor is there one human being to be seen in the whole abomination of desolation.

The film makes good use of non-actors—small boys in a Paris street and G.I.'s in a German station—and the quasi-documentary technique has, as I have pointed out, produced some powerful effects. But the most powerful effect produced on me came from the superimposition of a trivial story on a tragic background, and it wasn't a very pleasant effect either.

#### ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT

"Just a Spiv" (Wellington): Thanks, pal.

#### NATIONAL FILM UNIT

*WEEKLY Review No. 372*, which will be released on October 22 by the National Film Unit, contains five miscellaneous items: "Glass Blower," "Match Making," "Chinese Celebrate," "New Ships for New Zealand," and "Citrus Fruit Growers' Field Day."

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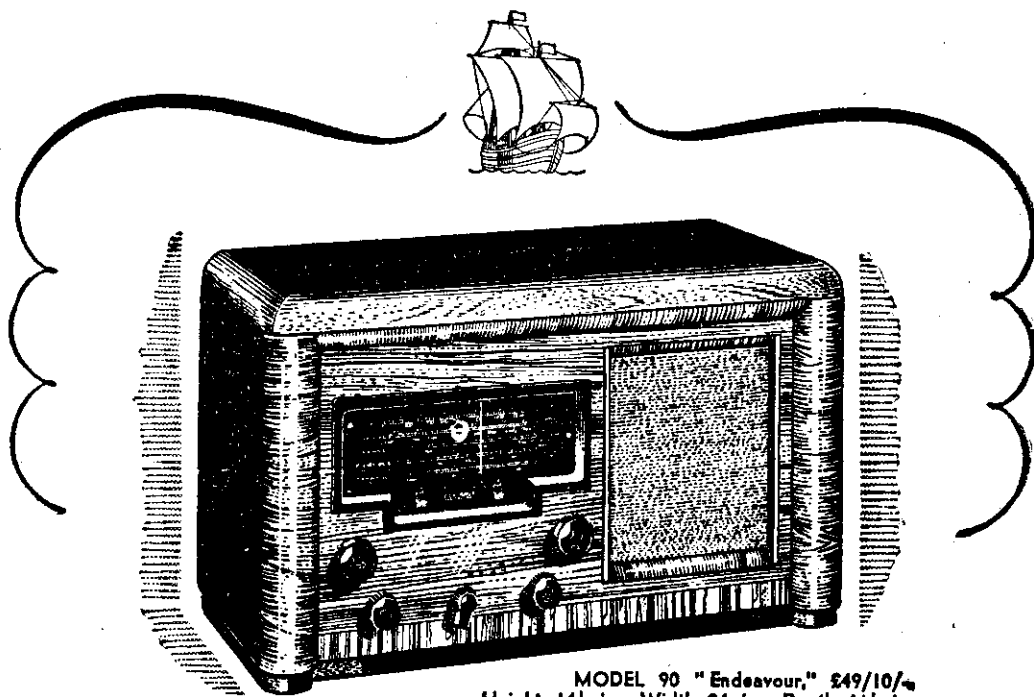


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