

BEHIND THE BATON

UNFAITHFULLY YOURS

(20th Century-Fox)

WHAT goes on in the mind of a famous conductor as he coaxes, wheedles, or bullies his hundred-man orchestra through a symphony concert? Does he in imagination scale Olympian heights to converse with the gods, or see enacted before him the fabulous deeds of a Nordic past? Not a bit of it, say the cynics, he might just as easily be thinking of to-morrow's lunch, or of the argument he had with his wife the night before. Carry this idea to its logical extreme and you have in nucleus the theme of Preston Sturges's latest comedy, *Unfaithfully Yours*. In this film Rex Harrison, as a temperamental British baronet in charge of one of America's most celebrated orchestras, plots successively to murder his wife for a suspected infidelity, then to forgive her, and finally to kill himself, as he conducts three major works of a programme in which he gives the most inspired performance of his career.

It is all in fun, of course, and as a fairly fast-moving farce this picture is quite good entertainment. Rex Harrison enjoys himself immensely in a role that enables him to over-act all the time, and Linda Darnell as his beautiful wife plays up to him admirably. Rudy Vallee, as the conductor's witless brother-in-law (and another millionaire), makes a good foil to Harrison's vivacious playing, and Edgar Kennedy, in what must have been one of his last performances before his recent death, is the music-loving private detective whose over-zealous snooping brings about all the trouble in the first place.

Nevertheless this film has a number of unsatisfying moments—in fact, it is another example of good acting spoilt by a weakness in plot. The scenes where Sir Alfred (as Harrison is called) mentally works out a perfect crime while he is conducting the orchestra are hilarious enough, but when he tries after the concert is over to carry out what he has just imagined, and makes just about every possible mistake in doing so, the humour begins to wear a little thin. The joke is unduly stretched out, the

action begins to lag a little, and the result is that the whole thing would have been considerably improved if it was a couple of thousand feet shorter.

Unfaithfully Yours was written, produced, and directed by Preston Sturges, who also made *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*, and as in that picture the humour is very broadly played. There is, however, rather more dialogue than is usual in a comedy of this type, almost as if it had been originally conceived as a radio play—a fact which doesn't worry Rex Harrison who, having by far the most to say, carries off his lines with his usual aplomb. On the other hand some of the purely visual humour seems a little pointless as far as the story is concerned, such as the apartment fire or the scene where the cymbals player produces an oversized pair which he smites vociferously to the rest of the orchestra's delight. But as most of this is good cinema it doesn't matter much anyway.

On the whole the film is something of a mixture. The basic idea is clever, the acting is good, the slapstick is often very funny, and some of the dialogue

BAROMETER

FAIR: "Unfaithfully Yours"

MAINLY FAIR: "The Roosevelt Story."

FAIR: "The Centre."

DULL: "The Sign of the Ram."

is quite neat. But there are too many slack passages and too many sequences which are merely banal—such as the one where Sir Alfred almost wrecks his apartment in looking for his home recording machine—for really first-rate comedy. The director seems to be trying to please everybody at once, instead of making a picture thoroughly satisfying at one level of taste only.

THE ROOSEVELT STORY

(United Artists)

ANYONE who hasn't a clear idea of Roosevelt's claim to greatness will learn a lot from this feature-length assemblage of newsreel shots about his political career, from his early Tammany Hall days as an unsuccessful backer of Al Smith, to the last speech to Congress after his return from Yalta. The most interesting part of the film, mainly because of the stark, factual picture of the depression which it builds up, is that showing how he first became President on his New Deal programme. Much of the film is devoted to Roosevelt's more celebrated political acts—the fireside chats, the introduction of the Social Security and Fair Labour Standards Acts, the "One Third of a Nation" speech, the "Full Speed Ahead" speech, the ridicule of those who attacked his dog Fala when he was standing for the Fourth Term, and so on. Much of the setting also is a wartime one, and Pearl



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