

BACK TO BERLIN

NIGHT PEOPLE

(20th Century-Fox)

BACK in Berlin again, I'm beginning to feel like a young Mr. Isherwood of the 'fifties, peering into every café (but with something more than a camera's passive curiosity) for a post-war counterpart of Sally Bowles. I haven't found her yet, but, only a fortnight after *The Man Between*, the uneasy frontier, the kidnappers, the double-dealing, the pasts you can't be sure about are still here. As CinemaScope, *Night People* has no special merit that I can see, but by the narrow, flat standards of the post-talkie, pre-deepie era it's quite an entertaining film.

A young American corporal kisses his little fraulein good-night and 50 yards up the street is blackjacked and whisked off to the Soviet Zone. This much is told even before the credit titles go up. The film proper is about the efforts of the Americans under Colonel Van Dyke (Gregory Peck) to recover the young soldier. The colonel's invaluable assistant is his secretary (Rita Gam). The other woman in his life, of whom Miss Gam is exceedingly jealous, is apparently a former concentration camp victim (Anita Bjork), who loves no man nor ever will. She is an intermediary between East and West. But the most original ingredient in the story is the young corporal's father (Broderick Crawford), a business tycoon who, heralded by a mighty blast from all the American politicians whose ears he can reach, arrives by air in Berlin to see that no one relaxes till son John is safe. It wouldn't be fair to tell the end of the story—it's not quite as interesting, actually, as I had hoped—but on the way the tycoon has to face a nice problem in values and is made to realise that, unlike home-grown kidnappers, "bloodthirsty cannibals" like the Russians can't be bought with American dollars. The anti-Soviet angle is, of course, the done thing, but I didn't expect the picture of the unimaginative big-business American that the first half of the film provides. I'm bound to add, though, that in his gruff way poppa comes right in the end.

Night People, which is produced, directed and scripted (very effectively



ANITA BJORK
The woman to watch

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BAROMETER

FAIR: "Night People."
FAIR TO FINE: "The Sea Around Us."

in the early stages) by Nunnally Johnson, is somewhat inconsequential in places, and its final shot—Mr. Peck in huge close-up (anything you can do I can do bigger) over a brassy patriotic tune—is pretty tasteless. But for a good part of the journey it holds the interest and has enough tension in the right places. I'm not a Peck fan, but he does a competent job in this film. Mr. Crawford also, a much more impressive actor, is up to standard. Considering her reputation, Miss Gam is not nearly as obtrusive as she might be, but of the women Miss Bjork, who had the lead in *Miss Julie*, is really the one to watch.

THE SEA AROUND US

(R.K.O. Radio)

I HAVE said before that I quickly tire of "pure" nature, and I was quite ready to become bored with a little over an hour of the sea around us. So it is high praise when I say that even after a first course of half an hour of True Life Disney (not to mention Leon Errol and a glimpse of Poppa Schine at the Kentucky Derby) I stayed interested to the end. It's a family picture, too. We all went along, and 24 hours afterwards my two boys are still re-enacting the gory whaling scenes—which doesn't, I fear, say much for their state of civilisation.

The Sea Around Us has a number of good qualities, but none more valuable than its variety. It doesn't give you a chance to become bored. It goes back to the beginning—to the birth of the earth and the oceans—and flows on beautifully through the sea's changing colours and temperament. There's a remarkable series of shots of microscopic life. Then we are at sea with ships and fishermen, or spectators of a fight (which might almost be a ballet) between shark and octopus. More humans are introduced: a shark walker, a crab herder, a deep-sea diver, a sponge gatherer, an under-water fisherman stalking some fearsome creature, a lighthouse keeper. A turtle lays its eggs and the young scuttle for the sea, preyed on by swooping gulls. It is all full of interest. My one regret (not a big one) is about the end—in the context just a little melodramatic, however real the threat of the melting ice-caps may be. The script by Irwin Allen, who also produced the film, is simple and direct—its "This is . . . these are . . ." form of narrative is surprisingly unmonotonous. I haven't read Rachel L. Carson's book, but if it is anything like as good as its film translation its popularity isn't surprising.

BEAR COUNTRY

(Disney-R.K.O. Radio)

LIKE Mr. Disney's earlier True Life Adventures, *Bear Country* is a delightful film, especially remarkable for its close-ups. Covering a season from thaw to snowfall, it gives a lively picture of the life of the brown bear as it grows up, of its parents, and of the other animal life of the bear country—hawks learning to fly, a moose learning to walk, young coyotes, a rattlesnake and so on.

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