

# PASCAL'S LAST TRUMP

## ANDROCLES AND THE LION

(R.K.O. Radio)

WHEN, as a very young man, I wrote asking Bernard Shaw if he would clear up a point which puzzled me in something he had written he ended his reply by asking me to bear in mind that "when I say a thing I say that thing only, and not half a dozen other quite different things which may happen to be associated with it in your mind." Now, hang it all, not everyone has been personally rebuked by the great man, and I'm sure I deserved it; but for all that I looked back on that furrowed juvenile brow with a certain sympathy when I came to consider the film version of *Androcles and the Lion*. Not that too many brows need be furrowed over this film, which is very good entertainment, anyway. But how many will get from it what Shaw meant them to get? It seems a pity that his ghost can't be present to rub it in at the end as he does in the appendix to the play in print.

The fable about Androcles and the Lion is pretty well known, and Shaw called his play a renovation of it. It's the story of a Christian who isn't eaten by a lion in the Roman arena because the beast happens to be one he had once done a good turn. Along with Androcles the play introduces several other Christians—Ferrovius, a fire-eater at heart; Lavinia, a "clever and fearless free-thinker"; and Spintho, a "blackguardedly debauchee"—and some Romans, including the Emperor and his Captain. As produced by the late Gabriel Pascal (who worked closely with Shaw on other films) and directed by Chester Erskine, *Androcles* is a pretty fair translation of the original. Some changes were inevitable if the production was to be cinematic in style, and sure enough, though the story and much of the dialogue is unchanged, there have been both additions and cuts. Some of the results are good, but certain passages of dialogue will be missed by those who know the play well, and their loss will not make it easier for those who don't to understand what Shaw is up to. As for the acting, the principal characters as played by Alan Young (Androcles), Robert Newton (Ferrovius), Maurice Evans (the Emperor) and Jean Simmons (Lavinia), seem very much the sort of people Shaw intended. In saying this and everything else about the production (and I know

### BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "Androcles and the Lion."  
FAIR: "The Glass Web."  
FAIR: "Concert of the Stars."

not everyone will agree with me about Lavinia). I should make it clear that though I've read the play I have never seen it on the stage.

Shaw meant us to understand that a Christian was thrown to the lions not because he was a Christian, but because he was a crank—an unusual sort of person. He intended his martyrs and his persecutors to belong not just to Rome but to all time. He saw his Emperor, "who has no sense of the value of common people's lives, and amuses himself with killing as carelessly as with sparing," as "the sort of monster you can make of any silly-clever-gentleman by idolising him." And, writing during the First World War, he made a point about Ferrovius, too—the "honest man who finds out, when the trumpet sounds, that he cannot follow Jesus." As I've suggested, without Shaw to underline we may miss much of this from our seats in the two-and-tenpennies; and because, considered as more than fun, this isn't his simplest play, I'm not sure that it would have made much difference if it had been filmed straight, without elaborate sets and without cuts.

### THE GLASS WEB

(Universal-International)

IN *The Glass Web* Jack Arnold has made a crisp, suspenseful thriller which is all the more interesting because its plot is tied up with a television programme and quite a bit of it is shot in and around a television studio. The scriptwriter (John Forsythe) and a sort of assistant producer (Edward G. Robinson) of "Crime of the Week," both get attached to an actress (Kathleen Hughes), who blackmails one and spurns the other's love just before she is found murdered. To make things even more difficult her estranged husband also is in the neighbourhood about that time. Mr. Robinson, who is a keen but rather ineffectual little man, has the bright idea that the crime will make a good subject for their series, which it does indeed. For the sort of film that can often get by with no more than average acting, *The Glass Web* comes up with some above-average performances.

### CONCERT OF STARS

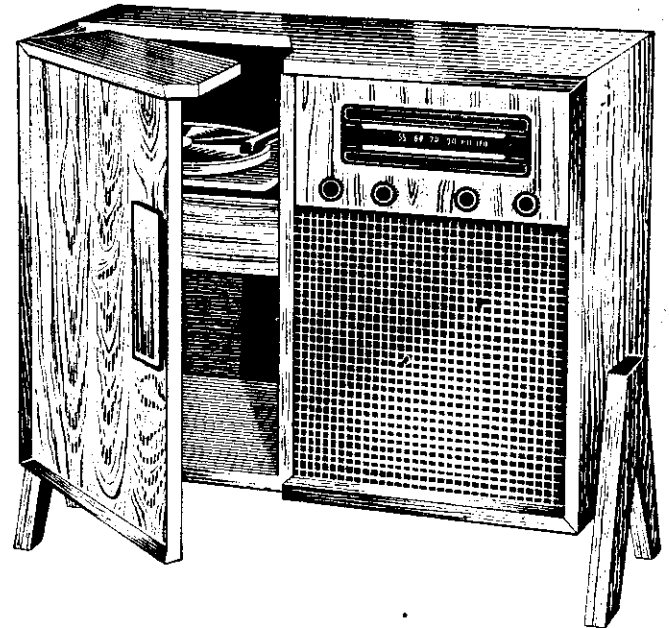
(Lenfilm)

CONCERT OF STARS is just that, a series of items, some of them seldom seen, by big guns of the Soviet theatre in music, dance and song; and it should be lapped up by all who love the theatre. The approach is very direct—that is, it doesn't make much use of unusual camera angles—and my own feeling is that it would have been all the better for a bit more candle-power; but I found the best parts, and especially the folk dances, exciting; and the pastel colour agreeable. An excellent Soviet animated short in colour, *The Magic Treasure*, was on the same programme; and, to be quite honest, at the end of a heavy week I enjoyed its hero's fight with a dragon rather more than most of the main feature.



ALAN YOUNG: No dinner for a lion

N.Z. LISTENER, NOVEMBER 26, 1954.



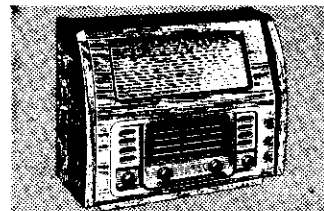
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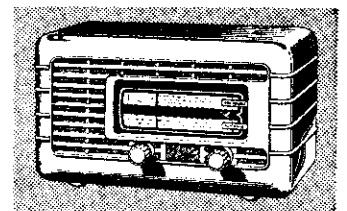
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