

MUSIC

Sound-Track Concertos

Movie background music has come a long way since the days when a loud chord went with a slammed door, a descending scale with a man falling downstairs. Whether it has gone far enough to be music in its own right, few music critics are willing to assert. But last week two scores by Hollywood's No. 1 sound-track composer, Miklos Rozsa, were fast-moving items. His *Spellbound Concerto*, adapted from his Oscar-winning music for *Spellbound*, had sold 100,000 sets at \$4 each; his *Lost Weekend* music was one of Victor's top ten "semi-classical" sellers.

Composer Rozsa, a small, soft-mannered man of 39, was chosen Hungary's outstanding composer in 1937 and

entire score. Much of his work sounds like a cut-&-paste job on themes and orchestral effects out of Tchaikovsky, Debussy, Ravel, Shostakovich. Some of his scores (for which he gets \$15,000 to \$20,000 apiece) have scarcely an original theme in them, are made up largely of a succession of transitions from one almost recognizable melody to another. Between contracts he tries to be original, is now finishing his second symphony.

At its worst, background music is a cheap way of getting or underscoring an emotional effect, full of Wagner's tritest tricks. At its best, says Rozsa, it can help to "complete a psychological effect." *Spellbound* and *The Lost Weekend*, full of mental quirks and jangled nerves, were right up his Tin Pan alley. To express one hero's amnesia and the other's lust for alcohol, Rozsa used an unearthly contralto wail, produced electronically by a radio-like instrument called the theremin (*TIME*, April 11, 1932). The theremin, almost never used in a Hollywood film score before, now is the industry's most fashionable musical device.



Loran F. Smith

ROZSA

Emotions by stop watch.

has conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic in his extra-cinema compositions. In six years in Hollywood he has written the music for about 25 pictures. Among them: *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *Double Indemnity*, *The Killers*.

Up from Hearts & Flowers. Like many Hollywood artisans, Rozsa belittles the work that brings him big money. "My style," he says, "has little to do with what I write for pictures. The public is only gradually becoming willing to accept more mature musical ideas. This doesn't mean I am discouraged. Years ago you expected to hear *Hearts and Flowers*. . . . In ten years we will be able to write just the way we do for Carnegie Hall."

Rozsa writes his sound-track scores in a soundproof room at home with a cue sheet of the film script, a stopwatch, and his boxer dog Mowgli beside him. Usually by the time the studios get the script to him, he has only about six weeks to do the