

## ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

By GEORGE ANTHEIL

**M**OST film music is fitted into its special picture only after the picture has been edited and sanctified forever as to its final footages. This, obviously, is a serious drawback to the betterment of film music for it means, simply, that all of a score, or most of it, cannot be planned into a picture in advance. Whatever effect the music of any given film eventually has, is, frankly, accidental. The film-critic may speak of "good" motion picture scores or "bad" ones; under the circumstances it would be more proper to confine himself to comment on good or bad pictures. The timing and planning of any picture make or break the score and label it either bad or good according to the solution of that picture's problems.

Hollywood has, of course, developed quite a number of "solvers" who deserve proper credit for elevating the prestige and artistry of film music to its present difficult situation. Two of them, Alfred Newman and Max Steiner, are indeed such experts that it is impossible to imagine anyone ever improving on them. In fact, as I have previously pointed out in this column, Max Steiner is a veritable genius in this regard, his artisanship amounts practically to artistry. Many of his recent scores show daring advances and startling newnesses, all of which indicate that Hollywood music, such as it is, definitely "goes forward." Tendencies from such a source as Max Steiner are "authentic" since they are truly Hollywood in scope and reason.

Despite all this, one cannot be too pessimistic about the "afterwards" method of picture scoring. It has gone just about as far as it can possibly go. Present-day conditions in the studios may allow a better musical texture, but not a better organic or fundamentally revolutionary score. A better score can only be planned out ahead of the picture, and that is not likely to happen until the studios actually begin to consider film music more seriously than they do now. "As good" scores will be issued all during 1939; better scores seem, to me at least, a long-shot eventuality.

For that reason I will devote little time to the so-called outstanding recent pieces. Having some part in their production I know only too well that a new score may be labeled "excellent" if the accompanying picture is excellent, or "bad" if the accompanying picture is indifferent. Criticism based upon trivia when these things, indeed, are the real issues, is futile.

From the Hollywood front, I find it incumbent to say that all things considered, the score of the English picture, *Drums*, is most competent. For an English score, that is a sign of progress. Most probably it was a composite work as screen credits were given only to the "Musical Director" which means that the studio musical director handed out the job to a bunch of men he presumed most fitted for it (not, as so often erroneously supposed, that the musical director either writes or even directs the music!)

The score for *If I Were King*, written at our own Paramount Studios in Hollywood by Richard Hagemann, was voted the best of the month and due credit is given—at least upon the screen—to the composer. All of which proves something or other in our favor as a democratic nation; here composers may at times get their names printed upon the screen credits, if the music directors are kind enough to allow us to sign their own works.

Speaking of Paramount Studios, incidentally, I must register my keen disappointment with Kurt Weill's *You and Me*. This picture score I heard in part before production was completed and had "gone out upon the limb for." But the ultimate dubbing made it a drab affair indeed. Here again, however it is difficult to know where the fault lies, whether in Weill, the studio's music department, or the picture itself. I strongly suspect the latter, but, as I already have indicated, it is more difficult to distinguish a bad from a good score, than a bad from a good picture. If the scenario writer and the producer himself have failed to vision the musical score properly and far in advance of the shooting, no composer on earth, not even the gifted Steiner, can write a proper motion picture score.

Many outstanding producers, as for instance, Bernie Hyman of Metro Goldwyn Mayer, object to *any kind* of music whatsoever. They suffer scores only to "background" their pictures because from way back, since nickelodeon days, the public won't

look at a movie unless music is played somewhere during its course. Nevertheless, and in spite of this tendency of the public to love music with primitive instinct, it is the present-day fashion to keep the background score down to a minimum instead, as was recently the policy, of overblowing it to a maximum. Film-dom has discovered that the public is surfeited with the eternal Wagnerian, over-sweet, dated, and over-meticulous music of the immediate past. These hurt the all-important box-office, thereby spelling, of course, their ultimate doom. In other words, the front offices are gradually having a musical housecleaning; "better a little proper music than a whole lot of bad, improper music" seems to be the motto. The "phoney" is being ditched, and the "new" is now recognized as a definite financial asset. Thus the up-climb towards a better but still "afterwards-composed" music. I remain skeptical as to whether such housecleanings and improvement in both musical texture, styles, and even composers will greatly advance film music. Finally, and in the bitter end, we can still never really get beyond saying "well—it was a good picture."

Mr. Stokowski this summer has brought us around to a more studied opinion on what should be the measure of film music. Scores today, written after the pictures are shot, are pieces of dressmaking, that is all. But their texture and vocabulary at least will have a great influence upon all future musical speech; they are the most heard and most played scores in the world, for that matter in history. But they are not the ultimate. We cannot sincerely believe that the present-day movie score itself has much of a future. We do believe however, that the "planned-into-the-script" movie score has a future—the great future which may be opened up by television. But Stokowski has given me a better clue. One day as he was leaving the Walt Disney headquarters, I said that I considered the scores of his studio by far the best in town. "How can they help but be" he replied. "They are the only scores in town *planned in advance of shooting.*"

Well, after all, music is surely important enough to the film industry to merit—even as do décors and casting—a maximum of pre-planning. Until the rest of Hollywood's scores are as good as Disney's we will never give them that same respectful atten-

tion, no matter if they come from the best potters and the best salesmen in Hollywood's musical scene.

Other news here is significant. Hollywood plainly expects a European war within six months, and is planning its entire picture output towards that end. Paramount's biggest production will be called *Invasion*. It describes the United States attacked by a foreign power. Most studios have similar plans. Serious minded composers with a theatrical-plus-political point of view should be interested, for if war ever comes Hollywood will be clamoring for a series of "ultra-modern" (whatever that means!) scores which will din the ears of a hundred and sixty million persons, all over the earth, daily. Thus we march into the future and Hollywood claims that "Motion Pictures Are Your Best Entertainment."

## OVER THE AIR

GODDARD LIEBERSON

IT'S not cricket of the F. C. C. to allow Arturo Toscanini to play American music on the heels of the Orson Welles Martian broadcast—the proximity of two such shocks is a little too much for the radio public. For on the evening of November 5th, startled radio dialers heard the NBC Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Maestro Toscanini play two pieces by Samuel Barber, American composer. They were his *Adagio for Strings*, and *Essay for Orchestra*. It is gratifying to have American music in the expert hands of Toscanini, but unfortunately, this great conductor has a faculty for singling out that music which represents the concessionary style of our native art. His opinion of American music must be much the same as the opinion of American life held by those Europeans whose only contact with the American scene comes through the movies or the reading of Jack London.

These pieces of Samuel Barber fall neatly into line with the other American music which Toscanini has chosen in the past. It is contemporary only in the sense that the composer is still