

dancers and even the ballet too often overlook. And—though this is a different world—during the voodoo dance the dancer was for a few moments really on the verge of becoming possessed.

ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

By GEORGE ANTHEIL

FILM music—at least in Hollywood—may be roughly divided into three different categories. The first is synchronized to the action of the film, the second to the mood, and the third to the locale, that is, it attempts to show whether or not the action is going on in a bistro, Mexico, Atlantic City, or down in the South Seas with Dorothy Lamour.

The first category belongs to the very infancy of film music. Whenever a screen man would fall downstairs in the nickelodeons of yore, he was almost sure to be accompanied by a down-into-the-bass glissando on the piano. When a close-up of a birdie signaled *Came the Dawn*, birdie trills in the treble were *de rigueur*.

This first movie music, however, has had the direst of effects. As most Hollywoodian directors cut their teeth upon it; it has for them a certain sentimental allure; they cannot stop asking composers to write music that ties up inanely with every bit of the picture's action. In fact Hollywoodian music is "action-crazy."

Much, however, as I detest the literalness of most of Hollywood's movie music, I detest the European method of scoring even more. For European music usually plays so completely "against" the film to which it is "set," that one cannot imagine why it was placed there, except, perhaps, for the very good reason that the film composer had an octet, a symphony, and a couple of string quartets tucked away, and so decided that this sound track was as good an occasion to get them heard as any other.

That, alas, is also the impression this commentator gets when he hears most "art" films. I have looked at and listened to these long and pretentious pictures, and I have been confused. This, certainly, is not the movie music of the future, any more than the

ridiculous "action music" of present day Hollywood is the movie music of the future.

I do believe, however, that there is a movie music of the future, and that it is already beginning to take form. A method and an esthetic for criticizing it has come to be born, not from Hollywood, but from the combined reasonable critical opinion of the world.

Having pondered over this matter for some four years, I come to the following conclusions about motion picture music:

(1) It must always have the sense of the picture at heart; after all it is picture music and not a demonstration of the composer's virtuosity in the various orchestral forms. This does not mean that music must only play *with* a picture; it can also play against it; in fact I believe that very often indeed it should play against it. But this "against" should be a definite and intended contrast, heightening the drama and the effect of the picture instead of merely drawing attention to the queer non-matching music.

(2) Motion pictures, whether made in Hollywood or Moscow, are made for audiences of millions. Therefore one of the principal problems of motion picture music is *simplicity*, plus telling effect. Please notice that it is not stipulated that this simple music be ultra-melodic. On the contrary, it can be as cacophonous as one likes, but wherever that cacophony occurs, it should be stirringly simple. The *intention* of all movie music must be unmistakable. Movie audiences only see a picture once; they have no time to analyze the composer's intentions.

(3) Motion picture sound track lives in the world of the microphone. Orchestrations should be made for that microphone, and not for any either banal or trick arrangement of orchestral instruments. Oftentimes one single instrument, "stepped up" in volume, produces a much more magnificent and sweeping effect than a whole symphony orchestra playing fortissimo; such fortissimos must always be dubbed down anyway, and they often sound very feeble indeed.

These are what I consider to be the fundamental principles of motion picture music criticism.

During the past year I have seen two remarkable films; neither

of them came from Hollywood. They were *Spanish Earth* and *Alone*. Two American colleagues—Virgil Thomson and Marc Blitzstein—wrote the score of the one in 1937; the Russian Shostakovitch wrote for the other in 1931. Both scores go completely anti-Hollywood for they play against their films throughout. But the *Spanish Earth* score plays against its picture in an odd way. Before I go into that I would like to say that I have nothing whatsoever against a picture composer scoring a war scene in gay or lilting music. As a matter of fact I believe that such music is much more true to war than the heavy Straussian groans that issue from the scores of most Hollywoodian wars. Soldiers, certainly, march into battle over the major, rather than the minor tonalities. Curiously enough, they are also more apt to use three-four rather than four-four when they go over the top—one need only think of *La Cucaracha*, or of any one of the songs our doughboys sang in 1918, to remember that.

But *Spanish Earth's* score does not build. It is not really dramatic. It is not motion-picture-music-for-the-motion-picture. Frankly, it does not play either for or against any specific ideas; it merely strings along. And it is difficult to string music along for any protracted length of time without a definite sag—unless that music has a specific plan. The plan of the *Spanish Earth* score is, apparently, to fill up the time allotted to the film, and that creates neither a musical nor a dramatic form. This, in my opinion, and according to the principles of motion picture musical criticism above outlined, is what the *Spanish Earth* musical score is, whether or not it was *intended* to be so. Still, it should be noted that many intelligent persons liked the music.

The fact of the matter is this: every intelligent human being is well fed up with the literal method of Hollywood underscoring. In fact many persons cannot bear the Hollywood method at all, and anything that attempts to turn this method upside down rates about one hundred percent with them.

Shostakovitch is one of these persons. Every score presents us with a clear picture of his positive hatred for Hollywood methods, and I am the last to take issue with him. In fact I should like to put myself on record as saying that although the Russian *Alone* is not a good picture and full of incredible "Russian-

lengths," nevertheless its score is one of the best I have ever heard.

Hollywood, of course, would look askance at his technic of playing hurdy-gurdy music every time the young lady school teacher thinks of marriage. We should write some sentimental bit; moreover we (as a class I mean) disapprove of inflicting hurdy-gurdy music upon any public if there is not a hurdy-gurdy in the picture—visible constantly and intimately connected with the plot.

Hollywood, too, would be utterly and completely confused by his technic of playing hideous marches (bourgeois confusion) whenever the Siberian sheep herders stare at the camera in unashamed non-comprehension. Marches, for us, mean soldiers marching and we have always thought that it meant just that to all the rest of the world, too.

Hollywood would never understand the long screeching flute and clarinet solos floating over the Mongolian wastes; we should have written (or rewritten) a patch or two out of *Rossignol* and considered that we had done something quite smart.

I believe that the entire "opposition" of the Shostakovitch score is magnificently and completely articulate. I am also sympathetic to the attempt made in *Spanish Earth*.

The authors have said to themselves frankly, "Hollywood music smells; we shall do the opposite, and, in so doing, shall achieve a freshness and an atmosphere that will be ultra-striking." So they did, and the atmosphere was striking, although not quite in the way they had expected. They had thought far—farther than most American screen composers, but not far enough. Not so far, for instance, as Shostakovitch, although the latter had written his "against" many years before.

Shostakovitch comes as near as solution of the problem of movie music as anyone. His brittle "sound track" score bristles with striking tunes, striking discords, striking orchestral effects usually upon one or two instruments, and many striking "againsts." But it builds and builds right up to the end when the Soviet airplane takes off and the music does likewise.