

must be a lesson for dancers, too, in the scene, because it makes you happy remembering it.

ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

By GEORGE ANTHEIL

NO one can deny that endless stretches of musical waste and cliché sound off from the majority of Hollywood films. But there is an important extenuating circumstance. Hollywood music is a high-pressure affair. The studios each produce from fifteen to eighteen pictures a year and some as many as eighty. The composer can be allowed only one or two weeks to complete a gigantic score and since, moreover, most U. S. films cost from \$300,000 to \$1,500,000 a piece, the gigantic investments must not be endangered by music too new or experimental whose audience-reaction has not been previously investigated.

Now turn to the European side of the picture business. The largest studios over there seldom produce more than ten films a year and the average can be much more accurately placed at four. So the composer may take months to write his score if he feels he needs that much time. And since European pictures seldom cost over \$150,000 each there is less at stake. European producers can afford to experiment with new musical solutions for old movie problems, in general to allow their composers infinitely more leeway. Who is to say that under such heavenly conditions Hollywood composers also would not produce better music? Considering the circumstances it is amazing how good their scores are, as is.

What I think fantastic is that the European motion picture scores are not better than they are. The new European films are very interesting, if for no other reason, because they show how the European composer now confronts these problems of mass-production which are day by day inevitably coming to be his own. For Europe is stepping up the production of motion pictures—often by state decree—and in so doing is bound eventually to step upon the composers' toes in much the same manner that Hollywood has long and steadily exerted that pressure. It will now be in-

teresting to see how the European musician will stand up against those painful trials and horrors which we in America have already partially negotiated. Time alone will tell whether the European composer will also succumb to the drab and endless clichés that mass production of musical background scores seems to decree.

Early this year Adolphe Borchard's score for the *Story of the Cheat* filled me with hope for new motion picture music via Europe, and I enthusiastically went to town about it. To follow up my hunch I scurried out to all the small foreign picture-houses of Hollywood. But the best score of the month, to my surprise, I heard after all in the glorified Pantages Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard where it was attached to a "B" picture and a crime story at that. This was turned out by the Columbia Studios and is called *Let Us Live*. The composer of the score, however, was Karol Rathhaus formerly of Berlin. Here we have an example of those procedures which are most aggravating about Hollywood. Why use a pile-driver to crack a peanut? Rathhaus is one of the best movie composers alive and should be used for better things.

Another expedition to the great gilded movie palaces was not quite so rewarding. *The Beachcomber*, an English production, was launched with a great deal of advance publicity concerning its "marvelous score." This score proves to be nothing more than a close copy of the method employed right here in Hollywood which seems to prove only that England is very seriously studying the excellencies of Hollywood's film technic. Yes, technically speaking, Hollywood is still the world's film master. Nothing new in this direction.

Russia, however, ignores the Hollywood manner in a way which could be very healthy and exciting, if so much of the production (musically speaking) were not obviously faulty. Often one cannot tell, because of the blurred sound track, whether the music has been badly orchestrated from the motion picture point of view, or just inappropriately or misadvisedly inserted. For instance a most beautiful Russian picture is now to be seen here called *The Childhood of Maxim Gorki*. It is utterly sensitive and excellent in a way that American pictures are prac-

tically never sensitive and excellent. What a beautiful score *might* have been written to this extremely fine picture. But alas, the actual musical background picture is made up largely of that peculiarly flat and boring pianissimo and *à capella* choral singing which, it seems, now identifies every motion picture sound-track coming from Russia. L. Shvarts incidentally "wrote" the score of this picture—that is to say he probably just picked up a bunch of electricians, carpenters and second cameramen who happened to be hanging around the studio at the time and told them to go ahead and sing any Russian barbershop music which might happen to come into their minds. He then apparently recorded it and dubbed the entire picture with it. As a score it is nil but we must thank him for one mercy—he didn't dub the *Volga Boat Song* into a scene in which actual Volga boat men were hauling a real Volga boat. That omission of course would not be possible in Hollywood.

It is too bad also that another very excellent, "crime" picture, the famous *Professor Mamlock* did not have a better score. For it was directed by Herbert Rappaport who, as I know, has an extraordinary gift for music. This stirring picture, coming to us from Soviet Russia, might—for all the sound-track told us—have been scored by one of our more tired and broken-down Hollywood hacks. And what a marvelous chance it offered for really exciting, magnificent music.

However, at least one European score heard here this last month was more than excellent—the very nearly perfect Jaubert music for *Un Garnet du Bal*. This made a tremendous impression on Hollywood musical circles. It will be some time before many here forget the eery dream sequences, the strange, recurring waltz (both in its ideal and later in its utterly crass versions), and many of the extraordinary inventions contained in the score of this strange film, the cumulative effect of which affected us so powerfully. Send us, indeed, many picture scores like this. They do more for the cause of better music in the movies than all the routine propaganda about European film music. We know only too well that Hollywood is not the only film capital surrounded by a limitless desert. Waste lands now begin to stretch around Moscow, London and even Paris.