

prettier girls, better actors and dancers—to say nothing of Bill Robinson—and an overwhelmingly impressive Katisha. But maybe it was just their naiveté and their primitive vitality which made the performance of the Chicago WPA troupe so stimulating, maybe also just being first.

The best of them all however is undoubtedly the *Red Mikado*, this being one of the six sketches which *Pins and Needles* have recently added to their picture book. The new scenes and songs are almost all of them assets, and not their least merit is to have replaced a number of weaker “serious” interpolations. On the whole, the evening is still a riot with the main credit going once again to Harold Rome who is by now established as a master of that pungent style so badly needed in the political theatre. Soap-box, good intentions and the right conviction are obviously not enough. If the political theatre has a message and wants to say it with music, this music must have quick wit, a hitting rhythm, a simple texture, and here and there a show of something more romantic. The Labor Stage’s little revue has all that.

## ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

By GEORGE ANTHEIL

UNTIL recently it has seemed to me that Hollywood’s motion pictures were infinitely superior to the European commercial product. They were always at least well made, had a certain lucidity and a sense of audience reaction; also complete disdain for those démodé forms of cinema still dear to the heart of many European producers and for their unnecessarily distorted angle shots, terrifyingly obtuse montages, horribly bad recordings which put music any and everywhere without apparent logic, interminable lengths in the cutting process, and all those 1924 avant-garde features which are a little sad and nostalgic in 1939.

But the latest imports show that this style of movie-making is definitely over. The new films are not “as good as” the American product—they are, emphatically, better. And the new European

scores are better too. It is a curious thing about motion pictures that one cannot adequately criticize the score of a mediocre film because then the score must be mediocre too; music and picture are so completely entwined that one cannot be bad without fouling the other. And a good picture will make its score seem better than it is. In these European movies, the scores are very adequate indeed and seem positively brilliant. In every case they are superior to present-day Hollywood music. They should have an increasingly significant effect on future production in Hollywood which cannot forever ignore their all-too-important point.

For instance, there is the score to *Pygmalion* by Arthur Honegger. From the movie point of view this is a superb job, whatever reservations one may have on the actual musical material Honegger has used. It remains within the motion-picture soundtrack medium in a way that astounds most Hollywood music departments. At the same time it presents an enormous number of new working-outs and many purely cinematographic inventions. There is no doubt in my mind that it establishes a landmark for the future scoring of motion pictures. Technically a job to throw Hollywood for a goal, and musically a decided advance for the movies.

Then, too, there is the score of *Alexander Nevsky*, the Soviet motion picture directed by Serge Eisenstein with music by Serge Prokofieff. This proves that the Russians, if they really want to, can turn out a job second to none. I don't personally care for much of Prokofieff's music in this film, it's not to my taste at all. But, and in spite of a certain inevitability in the Prokofieffian formula, the score is amazingly apt. It has a wonderful treatment of the battle sequences, and battles of this kind are difficult because of the innumerable action cuts. Prokofieff has taken every hazard in a way to make the Hollywood movie studios not only envious but anxious—anxious for the future of many a music department job. And Hollywood, of course, would not resent Prokofieff's heavy fake Oriental stuff à la Rimsky-Korsakoff during the final orgies of this picture.

The tenderly poetic French film, *Ballerina* had nothing new to tell us for the music was made of extracts from orchestrations of Gounod and Chopin plus a little 1909 French impressionism.

Here precisely is one of those scores which a successful picture makes sound better than it is. But, at the same theatre, I saw a wonderful film entitled *The Love of Paris*, with a singularly appropriate score by Georges Auric, a tender and fetching piece of work that outdoes all of his previous cinema efforts except perhaps the lovely writing for Cocteau's *Blood of the Poet* and some of the early René Clair productions. Auric, certainly, is the most gifted cinema composer alive; like Shostakovitch he has a positive genius for putting music into unusual spots. This is a big relief from the Hollywood routine where the spotting of music is regulated by laws as stringent as that boy should meet girl. Technically a chef-d'oeuvre, and musically very fine.

Two months ago I heard an excellent score by Hans Eisler to Jorg Iven's picture *4,000,000* which is about the present situation in China. I admire this music as a one-man job with many daring ideas successfully negotiated.



What is happening at the Disney Studios where Stokowski is working on a super feature? All information to date indicates that he is concocting a score out of a whole library of well-known music. Twelve composers are to contribute, including Stravinsky—parts of *Le Sacre du Printemps*—Massenet and Rimsky-Korsakoff. Mr. Stokowski will select and arrange as the occasion and his fancy dictate. His electrical orchestra, and a lot of new sound effects are among the surprises. There is still every rumor about the plot which has Mickey Mouse as hero and a great many other well-known characters—not the least of whom may be Deems Taylor, no less, as commentator.

All this may turn out to be extremely good. It may also turn out to be anything at all. The odds are even. Stokowski can be depended upon for masterly orchestral direction. But there still remains the problem of compounding a score from music written by at least twelve men. So far the best movie music has been the work of individuals. Well, we shall see what we shall see.