

itself the dancer can more readily preserve both the necessary independence and the necessary contact, and the audience more easily enjoy the collaboration of two forms. Besides, the more delicately adjusted the composition, the more necessary it becomes for the conductor to play it in just one way. For dancing however, any piece has to be played more simply and more elastically than in concert, because besides conducting the conductor has to see to it that the dancers hear their cues, and because (as in opera) temperamental variations of tempo are inevitable with good dancers. Mr. Kurz who is a first rate dance conductor would probably conduct Shostakovitch or Beethoven very differently at Carnegie Hall; if he didn't, his pieces would sound pretty bald (and sloppy). So a composer is safer if he does not require subtlety, because he can't get it. (Even without taking into consideration lack of rehearsals and poor quality of operatic orchestra.)

It is true that an exceptionally sensitive choreographer like Balanchine will prefer a subtle score; but his *Apollon Musagète* though it is universally accepted as one of the great triumphs of modern choreog-

raphy is still very rarely performed, while *Lac de Cygnes* is attempted anywhere.

Of course a composer's name can be B. O. for a ballet, but once the curtain is up the music functions in the show as atmosphere, as giving the general emotional energy of the piece, its honesty, cheerfulness, steadiness, or amplitude; with occasional bursts of lyricism, or wit, and an effective conclusion which are more consciously heard. Most of the details (details which dancers of course notice) disappear as such in performance, are swallowed up in a general impression even more than the detail of playwrighting is swallowed in a Broadway production. The composer is best off if he writes as close as possible to the real simplicities of his gift, because then the atmosphere his music makes will be appreciated. I imagine that such a simple communicativeness will always be danceable, and that the composer does not have to bother with thinking in terms of movement, unless he is going fancy anyway, and then he is pretty sure to be undanceable no matter how carefully he criticizes himself.

## ON THE FILM FRONT

—BY PAUL BOWLES—

THE prevalent criterion of film music seems to be that quality is in direct ratio to imperceptibility. An unnoticeable score passes for competent when it doesn't detract from the spectator's interest in the film. We do not need to con-

sider the basic fact that a musical soundtrack is three things: dialogue, sound-effects and music, perceived together and thus inseparable. But let us consider music alone, (unfortunately still the composer's sole precinct). Why grant

extra alibis to film music for the privilege of being dull?

What music is to good choreography, the visual action of a film should be to its sound-track. Regardless of the music's form, the dance springing from it must have a recognizable pattern. And no matter what the vagaries of the film, (including the restrictions imposed by the bugbear dialogue which is usually scattered haphazardly), the music created to give an extra dimension to the final impression must have a logical design and a sense of direction.

If this is obvious, why do the best composers, after showing whatever resistance they can muster in one film, fall back upon formulas for music by the yard? This makes background music, which usually provides for one motif per situation, and at most underlines the general *Stimmung* of said situation. Such film scores may be amusing when frankly inspired by the old pit movie-music, from which our present day symphonic scores are really not far removed. But these same symphonic scores are by no means genre pieces. They purport to be satisfactory auditory counterparts of a visual art which has reached a technical level so much higher that the disparity is painful to perceive.

As to the music whose form consists of a block, (phrase, measure, or even arpeggiated chord) known as A, a block known as B, (same thing, slightly altered), a block of A, a block of B, and so on until the given scene changes, — well, we've all done it under stress, but that in no way excuses its hack quality.

To ask that music be synchronized as exactly as sound-effects is the same thing as asking that the execution of the dancer's steps and gestures exist in some

sort of fixed relation to the beat of the music, and not that they should merely come to pass during a given section of it. Such matching of the two tracks presents a more delicate problem to the composer, and involves cutting a few frames of film here and there. It also presupposes a degree of cooperation between director and composer which appears practically Utopian. (In the non-commercial film, of course, such things have been known to happen. Cocteau and Auric gave a good example of it, eight years ago, in *Le Sang d'un Poète*.)

### III

Honegger has done a score for Giono's *Harvest* which as music *per se* is not too bad. As one might expect, a few sections are better than what we get from the West Coast. The sound-track is technically crude. It cuts into the musical sequences with sudden thuds, and stops the sound-effect passages just as peremptorily.

The music falls into two categories: cute and serious. The latter is very symphonic, sounds like Puccini, and definitely does not come off. The cute music consists of as good a solution of the carrousel problem as that in *Petrouchka*, and the scissor-grinder motif, in spite of being repetitious, works, because with its ratchets, castanets, sleigh-bells and small wood-blocks over an amusing brass score featuring slides on the trombone, piccolo squeaks and archaic bassoon tunes, it achieves a state on the borderline between sound-effect and music, without, of course, imitating actual sound effects (a fatal procedure). It is particularly here that one can see Honegger's sensitivity to motion that involves rhythmical disturbances.

In a way I suppose it is a pleasanter task, depending upon the nature of one's talent, to provide a score for a film which leaves great stretches of time without dialogue, where there is room to state and develop an idea. At any rate, Aaron Copland's score for *The City* is always good and often beautiful. Most of it is readily identifiable with later Copland; the Sunday motoring music for instance sounds like the *Outdoor Overture*. (There is also a note for note quotation of Debussy's *La Neige Danse*, which comes in the guise of traffic music occasionally, and works very well.) The themes have great charm and a pleasant elasticity which makes them capable of being prolonged at will without sounding as though they were stalling for time. There is always vigorous rhythm, either implied or expressed — a powerful support in the case of *The City*, although no music, however healthy and inspired, could sustain the unfortunate final letdown of the picture. In places the sound-track shows signs of hurry, both in the score and in the effects. It would have been

better, for instance, not to continue the andante right through the automobile accident. The fourth time a certain Morris Dance theme returns the listener's ear is pretty jaded. But the score is notable for its touches of beauty. There are spots where the music transcends the film in such a way that the action is a photographic accompaniment to the music. These few passages, in which visual and auditory elements merge, are the most poetic moments in any American film score.

It has been possible several times during the past season, to hear at the Museum of Modern Art what is probably the earliest good movie music: the score by Satie for *Entr'acte*. A lone pianist down front plays this stately little piece, and it comes in the middle of a program of just plain movie accompaniments, but you will listen and be delighted. The use of the block system, reduced here to what amounts to a mere frieze of repeated patterns, gives the music organic form. Present also are Satie's usual wan elegance, his perverse humor and nostalgia.