

a tension which never breaks during the whole piece, and the austere, diatonic contrapuntalism, it is a rather forbidding work. The *lento assai*, which forms the introduction to the second movement, appeals to me most; this is really a lovely section, an oasis. On the whole the sonata lacks light and shade.

Harris' *Three Variations on a Theme* for string quartet (Arrow) is a major work, put together with fine craftsmanship. These variations are really three developments of the theme which forms the introduction to the quartet. Each development constitutes a movement, and the resulting unity is highly satisfactory. In spite of the fact that the work is tightly woven, that each voice is constantly eloquent in its contribution to the thematic development, the music is never tedious, for there are plenty of points of repose which afford the ear the necessary rest before a new complicated section. Harris' contrapuntal writing becomes more and more natural and logical, more imaginative and personal as time goes on.

The *Symphonic Set* of Cowell (full score published by the Arrow Press) is rather uneven. The simplicity of the slow

movements seems to me trite and empty; the musical content and development of the faster ones are not very interesting. It is only in the finale that Cowell really seems to get going and become creative; here the orchestration takes on a more individual hue, although it never becomes really fluid or supple.

The very different score of Piston's ballet-suite, *The Incredible Flutist* (Arrow), presents the composer at first glance as far too clever, too much the wizard. This is real ballet music, music to be danced, not mimed, as has been the case of so many static ballets of the last few years. I have no idea what the plot to the alluring title might be; the music, which is a set of untitled dances, gives no clue. The score came too late for close examination, but it is provocative from the standpoint of orchestration. Piston has abandoned here his dexterous contrapuntal juggling for a music which is light, staccato, percussive.

No new works from abroad, nor, I suppose, need we expect more for some time to come, but I should think the time was about ripe for a new composer of military marches to appear in this country.

ON THE FILM FRONT

—BY PAUL BOWLES—

IN the series of "non-fiction" films shown daily at the Museum of Modern Art, there have been a few with sound tracks of some interest. *The Song of Ceylon*, produced by the Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board, claims to be a "dialectic treatment" of the "influence of

Western Civilization on native life." The subject matter called for a fancy score, which Walter Leigh, after consulting *El Amor Brujo* briefly, and the *Sacre* at greater length, successfully provided. There is masterly dubbing and blending of sounds throughout. The track is com-

posed of bits of genuine "exotic" Leigh (mostly with use of skillful and rich-sounding percussion work); recordings of actual native music, street calls and songs often superimposed upon the score itself; commentary in the Living Newspaper style and conversation in English and Hindustani relieved by sound-effects, and a chorus which seems too obviously included by the producers to show they could afford the works. The gongs and bells record magnificently, and are used with wise restraint. But the sound-track suffers from insensitive cutting.

The score Alex North and Earl Robinson did for *People of the Cumberland* has a few touches of interest, as for instance the banjo passage for the titles and credits, and the folk-dances later in the film. Otherwise it is a routine job. I had expected something a good deal more lively and tasteful; this I suppose is another example of work done in a hurry.

Revueltas' music for *Redes (The Wave)* adds depth to both the lyrical and violent moments of the film. He has an unusual harmonic sense which often brings forth exciting stuff. (At other times it lapses into Scriabin.) There is a definite absence of melodic invention, which is not too much of a handicap in this case, except at the end of the film, when an excellent rowing theme comes forward, grows, and becomes finally a rhythmical background for an embarrassingly pompous and savorless tune. The fight music is exceptionally good; it sounds more like his passionate *Homenaje a Garcia Lorca*. Revueltas deserves to be better known here.

III

Ernst Toch has written quite an adequate score for that old warhorse, *The Cat and The Canary*. The melodic ma-

terial is practically non-existent of course, since the subject-matter calls rather for instrumental effects which can be combined with straight sound. In this case the two have been made practically indistinguishable. Most of the time one scarcely notices where a chromatic passage, let us say, on the bass clarinet, leaves off, and where a door squeaking commences. I think this is a dangerous practice. Unless the audience has some way of telling just what elements of the total sound are supposed to be heard by the actors, and what are addressed to it over the actors' heads, it is going to get all mixed up. For instance, whenever the chandeliers flickered there was a squeal which, although in retrospect I can't assign it to any particular instrument, seemed to be a part of the score. From references to what the actors were doing I was still unable to decide whether they heard this or not. Such ambiguities can be obviated by any of several formulas devised to clarify and keep separate the music, which is a commentary on the action, and the sound-effects which are the action itself. To play his horror theme Toch uses what sounds like a Theremin surrounded by high muted violins. The effect is excellent, like a thin beam of light in a dense fog. The dissonant idiom is of course admirably suited to provide atmosphere music for unpleasant and dangerous situations. The little figure taken up in turn by various solo instruments as the boat glides through the swamp river is most successful, and supports the contention that in films sparse instrumentation generally comes off best as far as actual sound goes.

The score by Kabalevsky for *Shors* is mostly made up of military figures in brass, and symphonic marches. It has a

good deal of the inevitable large male chorus. The rest of the sound track shows more imagination. The juxtaposition of shouts, horses' hoofbeats, mass cheering, cannon detonations and general uproar seems carefully arranged. One device is particularly fortunate. The White general's palace headquarters are surrounded. He cowers in his office listening to the approaching din as the enemy army forces entrance to the building. He covers his ears. The sound track is cut. Complete silence for a few seconds. He uncovers them. Even louder hubbub. Again he shuts it out and again there is no sound. . . . Apart from the scores, which vary from film to film, the sound tracks of Soviet pictures are almost uniformly good. At least, of those that reach foreign countries. The Russians have a beautiful sense of the incongruities inherent in reality. They seem to love sounds for their own sake. Sometimes they continue endlessly with even the

most repetitious ones unaided by music, if it suits their dramatic purpose. (Especially the noises made by trains, both puffing and whistling, the sound of marching feet and battle cries.) Anyone who has seen *Peasants* will remember the murder scene. The kulak regards his wife's body with increasing horror. Suddenly snatches of a wild Asiatic song are heard from far away. Someone is singing in a distant street of the village. Nothing changes in the kulak's countenance. Only the audience has heard the sound. The music has absolutely no bearing on any part of the film, save that it provides a moment of intense poetry with its suggestion of the violent contrast between life and death. This is one example in many. I mention it to show the kind of dramatic possibilities which lie in subtle handling of the sound track, a thing Hollywood has not yet begun to attempt.

OVER THE AIR

By CONLON NANCARROW

ALTHOUGH I have not seen *Ghost Town*, I listened to the broadcast, and I do not believe that any amount of brilliant staging could transform this bad music into a good ballet. In his own field Richard Rodgers is excellent, but why was he chosen to write for the Monte Carlo troupe? Maybe he doesn't belong to the one-finger school of composers; certainly his score gave that impression. It sounded as if he had turned over an indiscriminate collection of tunes to a staff of arrangers to be whipped into

shape. Working backward on the logic of this selection for an "American ballet" one might get the following steps: Gershwin was very American; Gershwin was a Broadway composer; Rodgers is a Broadway composer.

WQXR has presented several men in programs of their own music. The first of these was the Hollander, Julius Hiji-man, who played his *Sonatina* for piano and, with Sigurd Rascher, his *Sonatina* for saxophone and piano. Both were unpretentious and well written. Facile