

more clean-cut and direct.

If Kurt Weill had not taken program credit for the musical arrangements in Elmer Rice's *Two on an Island* (1) I should not have believed it, and (2) I should certainly not bother to review it. He has; so what am I to say? If this is incidental music, or arrangements, or supervision, then I don't know what I am talking about, which is at least possible. As a job, it strikes me as pretty shabby; standard tunes seemed never so standard, harmonizations never so trite. Hasty and conscienceless moments during an entr'acte were followed by a mildly-ambitious moment (during a bus-ride sequence, I believe) where music punctuated a couple of speeches; I don't know which I liked less. Of a big man like Weill, one can ask: what is this, what goes on? (I listened a few weeks ago to his short cantata, *Magna Carta*; to a text of Maxwell Anderson, and done over the air; nervously exalted, as though obedient to some tenet of the year that demands composers be musically patriotic). Maybe Weill's real chance will come in collaboration with Moss Hart; or perhaps it has already come in the *Ulysses Africanus*, shortly to be shown.

Reunion in New York has some fresh music and some tired music. The tempo New York audiences seem to insist on is missing, except for a couple of interpolated American numbers which seemed out of place. I think these talented refugees should make up their minds either to stick to Vienna for style, or to give it up entirely. Miss Katherine Mattern is a real find, a comic. I got emotional at the number *Where Is My Homeland*, but maybe I'm a pushover for that kind of thing. The revue has been indifferently directed; the two-piano accompaniments are uninspired, but they serve. Everything is in the spirit of the people; and there's obviously plenty of that.

III

All I wish to say about *The Great American Goof* is that when you have words and music (as well as ballet, lantern-slides, and costuming) it is not unreasonable to expect that there will be some kind of planned mutual relation. There was none. There was instead a lot of flair, which is the natural enemy of intelligence, running amok over one of the largest stages in the country. Nothing was without talent; nothing got anywhere.

ON THE FILM FRONT

By PAUL BOWLES

I AM told that *The Fight For Life*, the de Kruif obstetrical epic, has the longest accompanimental film-score ever written. Pare Lorentz (producing for the United States Film Survey, now in Hollywood) wanted drama made out of

pathology, and so he subordinated everything to the music and got his drama. He familiarized Louis Gruenberg with the film material, Gruenberg wrote the score, Alexander Smallens and the Los Angeles Philharmonic recorded it as one big

block of music without ever seeing a shot. Then Lorentz cut both film and music-track and arranged commentary and dialogue in terms of the music. Result: a superb film, better than either *The Plow* or *The River*. Whatever imperfections the sound-track may have are certainly not due to lack of intelligent handling, but rather to occasional insensitivity in the music itself: a tendency to oversentimentalize in conceiving thematic material.

There are two important motifs in the film: life-death suspense (giving birth) and repose (after delivery). Gruenberg solved the first problem by using Lorentz's suggestion of writing music around recorded heartbeats. (Auric used an actual recording of heartbeats in *Le Sang d'un Poète* in 1930.) The recurrent theme for 'cello against varying arrangements of the same rhythmical pattern made by percussion, piano and contrabassi pizzicati, has a solemn and mysterious beauty (inseparable from its visual context, to be sure); it is a memorable bit of film music. In the second or lullaby theme, the composer throws subtlety to the four winds and gives us one of those sweet, callous cinema-dawn numbers which is meant to relieve the morbid tension of the birth-scenes. But given the fact that all the babies are born into surroundings of the foulest poverty, the music is violently incongruous. There is no relief implied in anything one sees. It is one long and wonderfully harassing experience; the sentimentality hits a very sour note.

There is a soliloquy scene during which the young doctor, having lost his patient, walks alone down wet streets. Here we have a curious barrel-house selection beginning with a slow piano solo, whose

sound is in keeping with the mood of the sequence until the clarinets and trumpet begin to wail and then it seems forced. The atmosphere-music for the long, hot night of waiting is good; as a basis Gruenberg has used a Yucatecan song: *El Rosal Enfermo*.

Lorentz likes to point up a scene with a fortissimo. He has a trick of suddenly turning up the controls to the blasting-point. Usually this summary treatment of the music is swell. Not inevitably. Sometimes it throws a weak musical moment into relief. There are no sound-effects. The music and dialogue are independently audible at all times yet there is no conflict in capturing the spectator's attention. A triumph of common sense and skill.

III

The credits of *La Marseillaise*, directed by Jean Renoir, (last big picture under auspices of the Front Populaire) promise charming things: original score by Sauveplane and Kosma (writer of songs with Cocteau and Prévert), and period music by Lalande, Grétry and Rameau among others. God knows what happened to it all. What one actually hears is several distant trumpet calls, a few marching songs heard above recorded symphonies, some drums and bagpipes once, chimes ringing for a good twenty minutes, and a lady playing the minuet from *Don Giovanni* on the harpsichord. There is also some nice shouting as the word *Fin* is projected.

Operas on the screen lose all the dignity that a stage presentation gives them, and for me the cinema loses all its own charm when it gets mixed up with opera. The relation of the picture of a spectacle to a real spectacle is perhaps less striking than that kind of relation can be with re-

gard to anything else. The eye is hard-put to find anything that can evoke sympathy in close-ups of human faces whose owners are busy trying to hit high notes. The mind is unpleasantly affected by the constant irrational juxtaposition of normal realistic cinema procedures and variations on purely formal opera conventions. The film version of *Louise* may not be so revolting as most others. Still, it's all nonsense. On the screen Grace Moore's stock-in-trade pantomime is quite confounding. Gestures which probably would not be too excessive on the opera stage are monstrous when followed by the camera's eye at exaggeratedly close range. The film needs about ten times as much screen-adapting as it got and that, I dare say, goes for all the opera-films ever made.

The score for the new Disney wonder-film, *Pinocchio*, is of course deplorably flashy. Here we have Hollywood in all its gilt and plush horror, particularly noticeable when there is unusually fantastic subject material like this. Choruses of awestruck tenors and moralizing school-teacherish sopranos caroling horrid pseudo folk-tunes. Glockenspiels, celestas, vibraharpes and God knows what. You know all about that kind of thing. It gets into Ravel every once in a while and then perpetrators Harline, Washington and Smith bring it back to normal. And the normal level is very low indeed. The nausea music at the billiard table is quite nice and so is some of the ocean and undersea stuff. Rich and crackling sound-effects often save the music from utter disgrace. One can either rage at the bad score for spoiling the film or completely disregard the matter of sound, which is probably wiser. The film is so tremendously good.

An actor, Fred Stewart, has made the

score for *Men and Dust*, a short two-reeler about silicosis. Here was a problem of really limited funds. The entire sound-track is of a piece with the film in its intelligent simplicity. One does not remember any music as such, but rather a constant sound of human voices, talking, singing, or humming. The idea of the possibility of human ascendancy over the deplorable conditions shown is thus made more vivid. There are four commentators who have different things to do, depending upon the timbre and kind of delivery needed for the occasion. Sometimes they chant in rhythm, and sometimes they merely repeat a sentence again and again with varying inflexions. (Once the command: "Get away from that dust!" is shouted as an accompaniment to a whole sequence of landscape shots.) There is an impressive little section during which Will Geer has time to render an entire song: *There Are Strange Things Happenin' in This Land*. The eye sees a long panorama of flat land with the dismal chatpiles in the background. When the song ends, the action continues. The sound-track is notable for its clarity and ingenuity rather than for any actual musical content. Good commentary by Sheldon Dick.

III

I suppose Alfred Newman is to be felicitated upon the scantiness of his music in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Apart from a folk-dance sequence called for by the script, a bit of guitar travel-music, and the faint harmonium strains used for three scenes described below, there isn't any music at all. The only concession to what Hollywood considers popular taste is in the nondescript orchestral credits-music. No orchestra was needed. The single instruments (banjo at one point

during the credits, and harmonium) tell their tale perfectly. The crickets, birds, frogs, dogs, roosters and distant train-whistles do the rest. However, since there is so little music, anyway, I think Zanuck might have gone the whole hog, and tried none at all. Then in place of the sad harmonium tune in *Ma Joad's* head at these various points we could have heard, for instance, the wind rattling the panes or a shutter creaking when she burns her keepsakes; a far-off train whistle or the equally poignant sound of an automobile horn on the highway at the burial scene; an owl or a baying dog when Tom leaves his mother and goes off into the dark. Care would have had to be taken to make these effects credible, to keep them from seeming forced or arbitrary; nevertheless, it could have been done.

In reviewing *Of Mice and Men* the *Times* movie critic found fault with the music played during the dog-shooting scene. His contention was that what he called the variation on *Hearts and Flowers* was not in keeping with the film. It is quite obvious, even to the layman, if he listens to Copland's score, that there is not the slightest musical connection between the blatancy of that old tune and the sensitive music for this scene. What the critic really meant was something else. He objected to the idea of using music at all to foster emotion for such a patently

sentimental episode. Such an objection is justifiable only if it is carried to its logical conclusion. In that case the music would be suppressed throughout the film, which would be a perfectly valid thing to do esthetically. But if one is going to admit the hypothesis that music heightens dramatic effect, he has to accept the idea that pathos as well as suspense, humor and atmosphere, has the right to its musical crutch. The difficulty is that pathos music, of all accompanimental music, is the most accessible to ridicule. Hardboiled resistance to it is a part of every audience's receptive equipment.

I should say, after one hearing, that Copland has done an admirable dramatic score. The music always seems to be going somewhere. Even where it is just a filler-in, it doesn't sound like it. The dog-shooting scene, with its touching cadences ending in a single flute tone; the nervous tension of the fight, when the staccato chords flying about in space suddenly crystallize into one painful, endlessly spreading dissonance as Lennie catches his assailant's hand and starts to crush it; the amusing eating-music with its porcine contrabassoon noises, the tragic texture of the final sequence—these places among a great many others in the score should be ample proof to producers that a good composer can write better music (yes, even movie-music), than their Hollywood music-men.

WITH THE DANCERS

—By PETER LINDAMOOD—

THE Ballet Theatre surprised everybody. This top-heavy art trust, three-sheeted as "the greatest collabora-

tion in ballet history," functioned prodigiously through a long three weeks' sprint. At no time did it suggest the