

ter of fact, heterophonic is the more accurate description for this kind of many-voiced music, but we won't go into that now.

ON THE FILM FRONT

—BY PAUL BOWLES—

CHAPTER One in the Story of How The Third Reich Conquered The World, known as *Feldzug in Polen*, has a score by one Herbert Windt. Herr Windt has obviously listened to lots of Sibelius with admiration, for the score is full of profound epic snorts and groans. Interest lies solely in the fact that it's fun to see what kind of soundtrack the Nazis make for an official propaganda vehicle. A kind of heroic relentlessness is obviously aimed at, and now and then almost achieved, but at these rare points it is the driving force of the film (made by army cameramen during the Polish campaign) which creates the illusion that the music has interest, never the music itself. The general effect is a succession of indigestible brassy sounds, often happily covered by noise of gunfire, explosions and roaring motors. Amusingly enough, for sequences showing the Nazi Army on the march, the music becomes typical villain-music — the kind used for the wicked characters in Disney. Perhaps for the same reason: to terrify the children. There is an *Erkönig* fate-motif, used only for map sequences showing Nazi victories and territorial expansion. You hear a good deal of *Erkönig*. Technically the soundtrack is lousy.

The Long Voyage Home, with score by Richard Hageman, is the pure and good movie cruelly betrayed by the worthless score. You need a sensitive job

for a film like this which depends vitally for its effects upon the establishment and clinching of definite moods. There were numerous practically foolproof spots where any composer could have made himself at least innocuous. But Mr. Hageman apparently thought he could do better, and so he made himself offensive. The music starts out legitimately with *Blow The Man Down*. Then for a "native" scene laid in the West Indies it does an incredible number which sounds very much like the Russian State Choir singing *Storm on the Volga*. With no shame for lack of transition even from one bad thing to another it plunges from that into super Herbert and thence into some whole-tone perversions of the shanty. Clouds of musical error keep rolling down across the beauty of the film. An example: after a touching death scene, one of the shipmates says: "Yank's gone." But what did Mr. Hageman use to punctuate that simple declaration? A Wagnerian brass comment, as jarring to the mood as the slamming of all the theatre's exit doors. The only pleasant spot musically was the scene near the end when the men go back aboard the *Glencairn* and an accordion plays some of that over-sweet music that has been forced on the orchestra in the rest of the film. At last one hears the idiom in its proper place, and it sounds all right. The only trouble here is that since the accordion

was used as sound-effect earlier, one is a little confused, and automatically looks around the picture for someone to be shown playing it. Here it happens to be the score. The musical opportunities for effectiveness are not only muffed, but are turned into weak spots that hamper the film. Which, considering that we are given so few really good films like this one, is more than a misdemeanor on the part of the composer. The rest of the sound-track is careful and accurate.

Two people named Espino and Tarin arranged a score for *Time In the Sun*, the latest salvage from Eisenstein's Mexican material. They seemed unable to decide upon a single method, and so they put together some simulated Indian tunes and some popular songs. Even the few indifferently synchronized drums and rattles, helped out by an oboe, (God knows why) sounded more like a bunch of drunks than like folklore. The harmonizations and vocal approach occasionally recalled the worst Hawaiian onslaughts. For the Tehuantepec sequence at least, they went ethnological and used the sandunga and a marimba. The carelessness accorded the soundtrack did much to make the film seem far less good than it was, although the footage offered us by Upton Sinclair certainly was better.

There is a sad story to be told about *Valley Town*. The film I saw will not be distributed, and in its place the public will be given an altered version hailing our forthcoming if still postponed entry into the present war. It is difficult to know just how Marc Blitzstein's score will sound when the revamped film is released. It is pretty certain that it will be less interesting. For there were among the portions suffering censorship two excellent innovations which while they

may not have been fully realized, nevertheless made the score important, I hope, as a pioneer. I refer to the soliloquy in the street: "What I wanna go home for?" (a step in the direction of something very desirable: actual and complete integration of score and commentary,) and to the unbelievably heartrending song of the girl at the table. (She doesn't sing it, but it is her song insofar as it expresses in a stylized popular idiom what is passing in her mind. One feels it might be the kind of song she would dream if she heard music in her sleep.) Both these passages are of course a carrying-over into cinema of aspects of the *Cradle* technic. The song is the more moving and the less successful. For even while I was being greatly upset by the emotional strength of the scene, I was conscious of a certain esthetic cheating going on somewhere. The gigantic close-ups of a miserable human face; the dogged insistence with which the film follows the unbearably pathetic business through to the end; and particularly the ascribing to the wife of a steel-worker a song which in 1940 is still of a subtlety that limits its intelligibility to the sophisticated, politically or otherwise (even though the song a few years hence might easily be as generally understandable as *Father, Dear Father, Come Home With Me Now*), all these things turn out to be the old tear-jerking technic using new material. Perhaps there is no better method. Still, there can be variations. At any rate, this scene, which balanced delicately on the brink of gross sentimentality, managed to remain dramatically effective. The piano is brilliantly used in the traditional "second movement" of social documentaries: mechanization of industry. Blitzstein writes a machine se-

quence which is superior to most composers' handling of the section: there is a basis of actual harmonic progression which makes for more sense than the usual list of rhythmical noises.

It is difficult to describe certain film-scores without making lists of their ingredients. When a unifying element such as personal style or at least some sort of arbitrary esthetic is lacking, there is left a chain of disparate units which can be appraised only in inventory fashion, and in a rather long compound sentence. Anyway, the perfectly agreeable score by Ernst Toch for *The Ghost Breakers* was a succession of richly orchestrated diminished sevenths, bassoon squawks, string glissandi, clickings, and echoes of passages from *Prométhée* as well as from Schmitt's *Dionysiaques*. The effects were good, and I suppose that's all the director wanted. Improbable music and terrible dubbing where the heroine plays the organ-tune that opens the secret door.

Power and the Land has a score by Douglas Moore, and the music is in the Unmistakably American School. It is bright and tuneful, inclined to the pastoral, and well coordinated with the film. Film-music should not be heard. The spectator should only be conscious of its presence. If it suddenly is heard, the reason is likely to be that its insistence upon one thing has made the spectator cease to be conscious of it. There is then a reaction which makes him not only hear it very much, but also become conscious of having heard it for the past ten minutes. Music constantly played can eventually lessen its own effect. One becomes conscious somewhere along in this film that the music is very much there. This is not a defect in the music's quality; it is a problem that often appears in the

making of documentary films, particularly in those where the film is all cut when the composer is called in, and where the music is supposed to provide the emotional drive or the clarity that the picture and commentary probably lack. The director wants to pep up every scene and thinks that perhaps continuous music can do it. Certainly continuous symphonic music can't. *Power and the Land* is overladen with intricate music. It is all good music and pleasant music; there is just too much of it. There is a passage of commentary recited in strict tempo to the score. One can take it or leave it depending on whether he likes the way it sounds. It embarrassed me. I liked best the water faucet and shower scenes: a charming little divertissement of brass and violin glissandi.

The score of *Children Must Learn*, a short documentary, is a companion piece to last year's *Men and Dust*, and is also by Fred Stewart. All music is provided by voices and guitar. This device for turning out a soundtrack on a shoestring has many more possibilities than Mr. Stewart has as yet utilized. Songs are used here with satirical intent, to point up the action. I prefer the passages of humming. A certain perceptory confusion is bred by the introduction of sung words. The eye sees the interior of a Kentucky mountain shack with its forlorn inhabitants enacting their daily existence. The ear hears a chorus of voices singing a mountain ballad. But the desired unity of effect is not there because the imagination is troubled by an overwhelming sensation of proximity to the unseen singers.

There is nothing remarkable in Aaron Copland's score for *Our Town*, save perhaps that it managed to make a suspiciously arty film generally acceptable.

The usual impeccable Copland taste and high musical integrity are of course ever-present, although the music turns out to be practically unnoticeable. The non-committal themes are carefully suited to the subject matter and conscientiously worked out. He achieves a simple "home-folk" quality admirably, and without ever bordering on the vulgar. Toward the end of the film Copland had the task of writing music for a long scene full of maudlin pathos. Even here he did not

compromise, though that lasting high note eventually grows monotonous. One feels at a certain point that it should grow either louder or softer. The burial music is as touching as one could wish. Other excellent spots are the deathbed scene with its flute and the night scene of the drunken choirmaster. If it were fair to compare fictional with documentary films as to the possibilities offered the composer, I should say that I much prefer *The City*.

WITH THE DANCERS

By EDWIN DENBY

BALANCHINE's *Poker Game* (for Stravinsky's *Jeu de Cartes*) revived this fall at the Monte Carlo is as good ballet as one can possibly have. And it creeps into your heart as unpretentiously as a kitten. To be sure its range is limited. It is no more than a new twist to the animated doll subject, which by nature is witty, ironical, pathetic, and playful, and rather likes to stay within the bounds of good manners. Ballet certainly can have a larger range if it chooses; and *Petrouschka*, to be sure, does choose. But *Poker Game* doesn't, and yet succeeds in becoming what used to be called a "little masterpiece." I think when you see it, you will notice yourself how easy it is to look at, how agreeably it shifts from group to ensemble or solo, with an unexpectedness that is never disconcerting; how lively the relation is between still figures and moving ones; how distinct the action remains; how clear the center of attention, or the division of interest, so your eye does not take to wandering on its own, and con-

fuse the rhythm intended. But besides being easy to look at what you see is amusing. The steps emphasize a kind of staccato and a lateralness that may remind you of playing card figures; many of the steps you recognize as derived from musical comedy. But the variety, the elasticity of rhythm, the intelligent grace, are qualities you never get in musical comedy routines. Nor does the musical comedy routine allow everyone on the stage to project intelligent and personal good spirits. *Poker Game*, by allowing the dancers just this, makes you feel as if you were for awhile in the best of company, with everybody natural and everybody interesting.

It is Balanchine's merit that all this is so. He keeps the dance placed in relation to the actual stage frame, which gives it a common sense point of reference. He has the sense of timing, the sense of distances, which makes the movement distinct. He has the wit which makes it amusing, and the invention both plastic and rhythmic which keep it going in a