

ized, the most deeply felt. The writing retains all of Britten's genius for brilliantly exploiting the strings, but gone are all the baroque elements, the embellishments and glissandos. What I like about this work, too, is the variety, and the nice balance between contrapuntal and harmonic writing. Britten is always unpredictable, and you never know when he will once more go off the deep end. But a few more works like this and

Britain will have the composer that was so brightly promised in the early cantata, *A Boy Was Born*.

Other scores to arrive, but for which comment is reserved until next issue are string quartets by Harrison Kerr and Eugene Goossens, the *Quintet in B-Minor* of Diamond and orchestral works by Slonimsky, Van Vactor and Robert Ward.

FILMS AND THEATRE

By PAUL BOWLES

ALTHOUGH *In Which We Serve* is a good picture, there is no doubt that a better score would have made it a more finished one. It is something of a mystery why, with so many more important elements here, Noel Coward should have been so eager to risk spoiling things by writing his own score. For he must be aware that however many facets of dramatic ability there are to his personality, serious musical composition does not figure among them. The score is of negligible value. Its thematic and harmonic material is undistinguished; few men in Hollywood would turn up with such a corny leit-motiv. An opportunity to write some important film music was completely thrown away in the case of the recurrent flashbacks. A group of men struggling in the sea after being torpedoed recall moments of their respective lives; there follows a series of waterlogged memories which make up the greater part of the film. The sinister repetitious phrase, (like a cracked gramophone record, or the final sinking into anesthesia,) was effective in the episodes

which began with the losing of consciousness. But the music here was as prosaic as elsewhere. A harp glissando now and then, to bear out the water theme. The music track was very bad technically: it buzzed and rasped. That may have been beyond Mr. Coward's control. But the ineffective score was not. Where were Britten, Walton, Addinsell?

It is too much to have to describe in detail the inanities of another Bagdad picture. This one had chaotic symphonic sounds every minute of the time it ran. The music came from the Russians generally, with Borodin and Rimsky Korsakov leading. The stomach dances were a little better than usual, and there was actually no harmony at certain moments. The sets, costumes and dialogue were all early Beverly Hills. The title was *Arabian Nights*, and Frank Skinner signed the score.

Spring Song is an amusing Soviet version of the familiar musician-movie theme of the die-hard classicist who is finally converted to popular light music. The same old plea is made for music

"the public" can enjoy, but in more sophisticated terms than usual. The film has a score by Kabalevsky, and contains some tuneful songs and some others with satirical patter which is perhaps funny. I don't know Russian. There is one lovely scene which I fear would never have occurred to Hollywood. A composer is trying to collect on a song which a singer has commissioned. The singer offers him fifty. Her husband says reprovingly: "Pay him the hundred, darling. After all, he's a composer."

In *Paratroops*, a nine-minute short distributed by OWI, Gail Kubik has as many minutes of music. (No screen credit.) The idiom, symphonic, dramatic, is Hollywood; the harmonic texture and treatment of melody are more distinguished. There is the same fault as exists in other documentaries: our composers and script-writers don't get together until dubbing day. I wanted to hear the music, which went very well with the picture. I also wanted (although less ardently) to understand the commentary. Of course they coincided every instant, and one had to sacrifice one or the other. It seems to me that knowing beforehand one is going to have to supply so many hundred feet of music over which words are going to be (even though not intelligibly) pronounced, one might attempt to devise really subservient music: a sort which would never try to get its hooks into the spectator's attention. A cruel thing to ask of a composer, since it would be difficult to make suites later from his film-music. Naturally this is not the ideal solution, on the contrary it is compromise with the existing unsatisfactory set-up. But it is a compromise which would involve the abandonment of constant symphonic sounds.

This in itself would be a godsend. And it might also involve the development of better music for documentaries.

IN THE THEATRE

The Pirate had a terrible book, excellent sets and some music by Herbert Kingsley. It is difficult to say just how much music there was, as most of it was played backstage, and the sounds from that place were on the borderline of the inaudible. One often had the sensation that a stagehand was playing with a radio back there, so indistinguishable were melodies, tonalities, even rhythms. Of course that may have been the calculated effect. In a whimsical production one never knows what may have been considered intriguing at rehearsals. However, there were several audible numbers. One was a fanfare played before the curtain rose in each act. I thought Mr. Kingsley might have written us three fanfares instead of insisting that we learn every note of that one, but no matter. It sounded like the brass accompaniment to the best-known record of Niña de los Peines singing a *saeta*. (Or an Egyptian military band.) It was all right. There were Negroes in the cast, and so there were, I believe, choral numbers. Or, the sound might have been made by wind-machines. Certainly there was no sign of any kind of Negro music. The rhythms one heard were *sotto voce* and non-syncopated. Even if the added atmosphere which would have been created by any sort of adaptation of Negro music was not wanted in the production, at least the score would thereby have taken on a stylistic unity. Perhaps even such unity was not aimed at.

A pleasant flute piece accompanied Miss Fontanne's reading scene. It broke down into backstage sounds. The noisy

parade in Act I, Scene II was the big number of the show. It had verve and color, included a barrel-organ. The ballet for celesta and double bass I liked. There were several little musical punctuations used to represent the actors' interior states – comments from an instrumental chorus. (Or like vaudeville trapeze-music, underlining the moment when the acrobat nearly misses and falls.) In the last act a song was sung. It was on the edge of being popular music, but lacked harmonic push. There was plenty of variety and some charm in the score. However, its effectiveness was constantly minimized. It all came out the small end of the megaphone. And I should have liked a little auditory suggestion of Trinidad, Martinique or Barbados. Mr. Kingsley allowed the sets to provide all the ambiance. In fact, they completely stole the show.

Something new in *Schrecklichkeit* was the New Opera's *Pique Dame*. The English version made forced and exasperatingly bad prosody. I wonder if it is possible to make a distinguished and functional opera translation into English. In this the sense was damaged by use of silly English words and phrases, and the sound of the vocal line was marred by wrong accents which were given prominence. Example: second syllable of the words "listen" and "secret." Add to this a performance whose diction had so low a general standard that even in a sequence where the hero read aloud a letter, it was impossible to get more than every tenth word. There was no stylistic unity in the décors. The gaga troupe ranted in front of sets whose projected cloud-effects twitched; their gestures were caricatures of the operatic tradition. The direction brought the entire chorus wandering

pointedly across the stage to sing a few lines which might better have been sung offstage. One had the recurrent impression that the first scene was meant to be outside a lunatic asylum during the noon rest hour, and that all the gentlemen parading before the footlights thought they were Napoleon the First.

On the other hand, *Macbeth*, besides being simpler, more singable and a better opera than *Pique Dame*, enjoyed the advantages of a good production. For one thing, it was given with the original untranslated libretto, which was an astonishing device for the New Opera to try – Verdi in Italian! Then, it had good sets, effective direction and one superb characterization by Regina Resnick. This was really Lady Macbeth; Miss Resnick never forgot she was working in the theatre. She merely happened to be singing instead of speaking her lines, and she sang them beautifully. It was clear she did not consider an opera an animated concert in which one moves about, wears a costume, and takes just a few more liberties with the music than as if one had to stand still. She made no bones about stealing the show. This was a good idea, as it comes off better that way, at least up through the sleepwalking scene.

Joseph Wood's prize-winning one-act opera, *The Mother*, was given for the first time at the Juilliard School, jointly with the first New York stage production of Randall Thompson's *Solomon and Balkis*, also a one-acter. The best thing about *The Mother* was the orchestration, which also seemed to be what had interested the composer most. The piece was like an instrumental tone-poem with vocal accompaniment. In form it was a series of static tableaux. What dramatic quality it had was made by the orchestra

rather than by the vocal line, which was usually a secondary consideration. There were one or two tunes which seemed to have been allowed to grow naturally, but one felt the greater part of the melodic material to have been formulated by adherence to preconceived theories about prosody. Any given tone appeared to have been chosen more with an eye to its general pitch location than to its effect on the line's logic or its strategic harmonic value. There was rough handling of word accents, too. The libretto was embarrassingly ingenuous.

Randall Thompson's *Solomon and Balkis*, commissioned by both The League of Composers and the Columbia Broadcasting System, was a competently written little opera whose argument presupposed that polygamy necessarily makes for humorous dramatic material. Even if this were true, the element of humor is not a thing that can be developed in song. One understands it instantaneously if it is there, and no amount of verbal elaboration can possibly sharpen its impact. Not being made of satire, the exposition always seemed to be explaining something quite obvious. One found one-

self hearing and understanding the words and rather wishing one couldn't. However, a simple harmonic structure and singable vocal line kept things moving. Instruments did not get in the way of voices, and the melodies were not forced. With some other subject matter the piece could have been extremely enjoyable.

At the High School of Music and Art the students, after doing a bit of unsuccessful rewriting of the end, presented the Copland-Denby *Second Hurricane* in its first functional New York performance. It is a spirited, poetic work. In spite of its apparent delicateness, it is pure sinew, made to stand up under rough treatment. The kids went at it with gusto, and enunciated superbly. It was too bad there was no direction to help them know what to do with their bodies while they were supposed to be "acting natural." The less moving around a character was allowed to do, the better his performance was. But the music more than made up for production weaknesses. It is Copland's most lyrical work, and contains, too, some of his most nervously exciting passages.

WITH THE DANCERS

By EDWIN DENBY

BALLET IMPERIAL (Balanchine-Tchaikovsky-Doboujinski; danced by Kirstein's American Ballet) was the single full-length ballet offered at the New Opera and it is the most brilliant ballet of the season. In intention it is an homage to the Petersburg ballet style, the peculiarly sincere grand manner which the Imperial Ballet School and

Petipa evolved. We know the style here from the choreography of *Swan Lake*, *Aurora's Wedding*, or *Nutcracker*, even of *Coppelia*, though all of them have been patched out; we know it from glimpses of grandeur in the dancing of the Russian-trained ballerinas; from photographs, especially of the young Pavlova and the young Nijinsky; and