

kowski has signed for one picture, *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, at the Walt Disney Studios. Disney, as has been long evident, turns out the most consistently good scores here. His music department should be recognized by serious American musicians as the most ingenious in the motion picture centre.

This correspondent has dutifully visited any number of foreign-language motion picture theatres, of which there are now many in Hollywood, vainly hoping to find an outstanding score. There were none of importance. *Club des femmes*, a French production is interesting, refreshing, but—honestly—too trivial. The score, by Marius-François Gaillard, misses the dramatic punch that all motion picture music must have. Nevertheless, it is at least genial alongside the heavy-handed, post-Straussian scores that are so blatantly Hollywood.

Yesterday I attended the preview of *The Buccaneer*, a Cecil B. DeMille production, for which I wrote the music. I was astonished not to hear a single note of either of two longish "war sequences;" the entire score had been dubbed down so low, beneath the cannon shots and dialog, that hardly a musical sound came through. There was, in consequence, a marked let-down in this scene. When will moviedom realize that music stirs the heart and builds up to adequate climaxes only when it can be heard. We had a markedly better effect in *The Plainsman*; the battle music here was heard to considerable effect. This is all very discouraging. It will be many years, at this rate of progress, before a serious composer can put his signature to a Hollywood musical production without quivering and without apprehension. He should think twice before accepting a commission to write a purely "background" score. The results create an overpowering sense of futility.

WITH THE DANCERS

ELLIOTT CARTER

WHEN I consider how often large, official artistic ventures miscarry, I must admit that the Dance International (which was held all through the month of December) did a

real service in bringing American ballet and the Modern Dance to a larger public than they usually reach. There were, of course, more than a few "society" events of mediocre quality at the Rainbow Room and bad exhibits of costumes and scenery. But the two performances at the Centre Theatre were justly successful in showing where America stood in the two fields. There was a minimum of attempt to play down to the public and a maximum to attain a high artistic standard. The films of exotic dancing were also an excellent feature of this mammoth project.

The ballet, by its very nature and background, is easily led into vulgarization; its evening went farther in that direction than that of the Modern Dance. Especially as three Broadway entertainers, Patricia Bowman, Paul Haakon and Paul Draper were on the program. Nevertheless the two men at least showed how remarkable a technical development ballet and tap have reached in the commercial theatre. The ballet groups were more serious.

Catherine Littlefield's troupe, always astonishing for its great number of performers, gave a better performance than usual, probably because the choreography had only the most elementary quadrille steps and contained a great deal of the obvious pantomime in which her troupe is most at home. *Barn Dance* was an amusing piece based on fiddler tunes in conventional arrangements. It caught in a showy way the atmosphere of these social dances and proved a pleasant piece of Americana. José Limon and Felicia Sorel carried the Dance Centre's otherwise uninteresting performance of *El Amor Brujo* with some intense Spanish tantrums of the expected kind.

The Ballet Caravan's *Showpiece*, to a specially commissioned score from Robert McBride, was the only group work with any notable dancing during the evening. It showed in a fresh new way how well each of the members of the small company danced, how able they were despite a certain immaturity. The work has a great deal in its favor. There is little fuss and pretension about it. Straightforward, with no attempt to build up an elaborate atmosphere, it shows young people doing ballet dances in bright costumes before a black curtain. Throughout, the choreography was ingenious and, within the limitations of the classic steps, had imagination. Probably because of a certain formlessness and lack

of emphasis in the music, the ballet did not achieve a natural and theatrical articulation. This somewhat clouded the brilliance of the dancing.

The Modern Dance evening of the festival was a summary of what the courageous people in this city have achieved in the last ten years of hard work. It began at the beginning of the movement, Ruth St. Denis coming out of her retirement to perform some of those Oriental numbers that still, as in *White Jade*, retain the beauty and delicacy of gesture for which she is renowned. Like Swinburne's Greece or Rossetti's Middle Ages, Ruth St Denis's Orient is superficial and false, but it is theatrical.

The remainder of the program was devoted to Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Tamiris, Hanya Holm and their groups, dancers who have gained a large and enthusiastic audience and who are supported on every hand. Personally I cannot share this enthusiasm. In making the following attack I believe that I am also voicing the opinions of many who, like myself, are concerned with the future of dancing in this country.

Once Miss St. Denis' pupils, though now in violent reaction against her prettiness, Graham, Humphrey and Weidman have continued her tendency to falsify. Instead of misrepresenting the Orient, which is pardonable and perhaps necessary to a culture so basically different, they misrepresent our contemporary American life to us. For they show it in the light of a special state of mind, that of the Germans right after the war, suicidal, hysterical and not typical of the rest of life, then or now. In America, famine, inflation, and complete disillusionment have not existed on a large enough scale to be part of our common background; they remain a matter of speculation to most of those who attend the dance recitals. If these tragic things are to be shown strongly they must reveal a more cogent point of view.

Each performance at the Centre Theater, after Miss St Denis', presented a group of discontented, unhappy, tortured, self-destructive people on the stage. This naturally arouses a feeling of pity and sympathy in the audience, and leaves it with little respect or interest in the performers as artists. Instead of giving the audience a dance work to enjoy or be instructed by, this school present themselves as people acting under an intense emotional

strain. And, as if this were not embarrassing enough, they appear to be quarreling with and loathing the audience. Every gesture that might take on a meaning if fitted into a context is quickly frustrated by the succeeding one, the atmosphere is of confusion and uncertainty, and hardly conducive to the presentation of an idea. The music is no less frustrated, without line, point of emphasis, natural sequence or development. Doubtless the dancers believe (and with some justice) that modern life is disintegrated and frustrated. But there have been works—and there are going to be more—that show this strongly and clearly without being so technically submerged by their message that they are weak and ineffective: Berg's *Wozzek*, Weill and Balanchine's *Seven Deadly Sins* and Blitzstein's *Cradle Will Rock*.

What the dancers want to say about society may be significant and valuable. It should be said as strongly and with as much conviction as possible in order for the idea itself not to succumb to the very forces they criticize. Moreover, their message is not delivered on the stage, but via their program notes. Shan-Kar has a much less important announcement to make to Western society and yet out of his performances comes something, remote as the sources may be, that is more true than anything the modern dancers have yet been able to achieve. He deals with certain basic facts about human feeling, and gets his results through a very highly developed technic and a thorough muscular control. His discipline is so great that the moment he comes on stage and makes a gesture, no matter how slight, he arouses a feeling of respect toward him, as an artist, and this is maintained throughout the performance. What he does, not what he is, alone must be considered. And what he does has to do with the body and its parts from eye to toe. The modern dancer's body is always used monotonously as a whole, and the lack of disciplined gesture, hence concentration of meaning, dissipates the message.

The theme of revolt against bourgeois society (and I suspect against any form of society) is a recurrent one with artists. But surely the direction should be not toward that of emotional, chaotic conflicts as these dancers seem to maintain but toward greater physical, intellectual and emotional discipline; that is the only road to liberation from the society they loathe. The single tendency in this direction to be noted at the Centre Theatre

was in Hanya Holm's group which presented a portion of their large work *Trend*, given previously in complete form at Mecca Temple. Here was real beauty and significance of movement though, as so often in these large works, the level of stylization was uncertain. Obvious realistic parody stood side by side with the most abstract and obscure movements. The insect-like machine gestures at the beginning of *Trend* and the remarkable spasmodic convulsions of isolated individuals during the "cataclysm" were quite extraordinary; they showed what this type of dance could be if it were freed from the personal hysteria that now surrounds it, and made more straightforward.

As this issue goes to press, I should like to include a note on the All-American evening the Ballet Caravan has just given at the Avery Memorial in Hartford. Virgil Thomson's *Filling Station* which had its premiere on this occasion and Paul Bowles' *Yankee Clipper* seem to me to be outstanding American ballets.

Filling Station is a pointed satire on the way Americans think about the different classes of their society. As if in a movie the characters are all brought together at a gas station, where a hold-up is staged by gangsters. Paul Cadmus has dressed all this with remarkable cleverness and style; in fact his scenery and costumes almost walk away with the work. Lew Christensen's choreography, however, is both expert and witty and Thomson's score, like old-time pre-sound, film piano-playing, does not underline the action, move by move, but forms a running background that catches the simplicity of character and situation amusingly. His jazz number is one of the best satires of this style that I know.

Bowles' work has the much more usual relation between ballet music and action, for each situation is made into an appropriate dance. It is straightforward and episodic, like all conventional ballets. Nevertheless it is the Caravan's most deeply felt work. Having to do with the old story of the clipper ship sailor who is gotten by the sea, the dancing and music are at times boisterous and at times tender. Bowles has written some of his best music in the tuneful sailor dances. He manages to retain his own personality while making pastiches of exotica. Loring's choreography is most convincing in its wistful moods and the whole is worth seeing because of its touching and evocative charm.