

forces within the bounds of a well-organized musical form.

In *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Randall Thompson displays a canny control over problems of choral technic and text setting. The excerpts from Isaiah are arranged in seven sections, each of which is treated as a musical entity. Though the texts of two of the sections are of some extent, each develops out of a single idea. The music can therefore concentrate its forces on the development of a clearly articulated idea. The free declamatory rhythms of the prose are utilized by the composer to make an excellent contrast with the more formal development of the other sections.

While *The Peaceable Kingdom* leaves little to be desired in its mastery of a-cappella technic and text setting, the essentially creative aspect of the music, its imaginative content, is not so well sustained. The musical setting attains real inventiveness only when the text seems to fire the composer's imagination. The poetry, for instance, of the end of the sixth section inspires the composer to a musical conception of real beauty. Where the text lacks that bright edge of sheer poetry or sheer reality, the music likewise begins to lose a certain freshness. The fierce denunciation of the prophet, the howling city, the afflicted multitudes, those motives in short that strike a note of deep reality today, evoke the best sustained and most vital moments in Mr. Thompson's work. But texts like that of the first section, or of the dénouement of the last, offer an altogether abstract inspiration. "To come into the mountains of the Lord" was a downright concrete matter for the faithful of former days. Today it loses that sharply defined significance. The symbolic meaning with which we endow these texts makes them a poor substitute for the realities of heart and mind which the composer demands of the word.

Israel Citkowitz

REVIVAL OF DIAGHILEV'S NOCES

Noces in the choreography of Nijinska (revived this spring by the Monte Carlo Ballet) is one of the finest things I ever saw. I'm sure it is one of the finest things one can see anywhere. And if I could think of higher praise I would write it.

Noces is noble, it is fierce, it is simple, it is fresh, it is thrilling. It is full of interest. It is perhaps an indication of the heroic age

of Nijinski. There is a realness in the relation of dance and music like a dual force, separate but inseparable. The movements, odd as they are and oddly as they come, often in counter accent, are always in what theoreticians call "motoric logic;" that is they are in a sequence you get the hang of to your own surprise, and that has a quality of directness when performed. Amazingly few movement-motives are used, and only the clearest groupings and paths, making the rhythmic subtlety obvious by contrast. That all these movement-motives should be accentuating the direction into the floor leads to such interesting results as that ballet dancers more familiar with the opposite direction do these movements with a curious freshness; that the leaps seem higher; that further, the "pointes" get a special significance and hardness (almost a form of tapping), a hardness which all the performers by the way had not understood; and, as a further example, this general downward direction gives the heaped bodies a sense further than decoration and the conventional pyramid at the end, the effect of an heroic extreme, of a real difficulty. This sense of the realness of what is being done is underlined by the constant use of people at rest contrasted with people dancing, in the last part people actually at rest on chairs. How often in other ballets have people stood about while others danced without adding by their contrast, because the contrast was not being used. And the stillness of the whole company at the end after all their frenzy is a climax of genius. During the whole last scene, the climax is a sort of steady expansion, as thrilling and inevitable as for the intelligence the motion from the particular to the abstract.

Of the dancers themselves I would like to say that, though they seemed handicapped by insufficient rehearsals, they danced, especially at the last performance in New York, with a fine fervor. In fact the group of the Ballet Russe deserves every praise; the way they are overworked by the management is inhuman, because it is destructive of talent; and that they can still offer so much is a miracle.

Of the music of *Noces* I need not speak; it is as fine as the choreography. The scenery and costumes I find satisfactory, though I should like to see the four pianos on the stage, and the bed through the door of the house. The production is fifteen

years old, and scenery and costumes belong more completely than choreography or music to that "abstract" fashion, the didactic heroics of the early twenties (those were Mary Wigman's best days, too).

Of another addition to the repertory, a new version of *Jardin Public* (choreography Massine, music Dukelsky) I personally feel the less said the better. What I saw was an unpleasant confusion. In the mess of movements the "Poet's" bit of classic clarity did not help. Massine had found a few ingenious gestures for the "Workers" and odd ways of posturing for himself, rather reminiscent of Kreutzberg. But I saw no interest, or strength, or even intention to anything. Coming from our first ballet company, I found it thoroughly distasteful.

Edwin Denby

THOMSON SCORES FOR A NEW DEAL FILM

THE *Plow that Broke the Plains*, is a new American documentary movie, produced by the Resettlement Administration, written and directed by Pare Lorenz, photography by Ralph Steiner, Paul Strand, and Leo Hurwitz, music by Virgil Thomson.

The achievement of this movie is that it gave young photographers and a young musician a chance. We have too few movies that do. The intelligence both of our artists and of our audience suffers from lack of employment. The Government is to be congratulated on making this start.

"T. P. t. B. t. P." has a fine subject. Settlement of the Great Plains, intensive agriculture owing to the war boom and the credit boom, then drought, dust storms, misery, and Relief. The director has dramatized it in the form of a documentaire, a good form but an art form. Unfortunately, seen as a work of art, the film is bad.

The trouble is that the weight of the film—the most space, best build, heaviest shots—center around the exploitation of the land that collapsed with the crash of '29. The boom is the big thing pictorially. When the drought comes, the most thrilling pictures are over, the drought has merely the effect of denouement,