

*Can't Be Love*, is perhaps a notch or two above even that. What these gentlemen need is a book with lots more comedy and fewer errors.

As for "serious" music there seems at the moment to be little room for it in the theatre. There has been the Maurice Evans' *Henry IV*. In productions like these one hardly ever pays much attention to the incidental music, and in this special case, it's a lot more rewarding to listen to Mr. Addy's glorious Hotspur, and to Evans who has very fittingly adopted the voice of W. C. Fields for his Falstaff. The music, chiefly short interludes, was contributed by Rupert Graves. His interpolations are modest and unobtrusive which is as it should be; but they have a slight cinematic tinge, and they occasionally make the mistake of encroaching upon the end of a scene. The text transitions are in themselves an emotional device; and to stress them with music is no improvement.

But the real problem in composing for the present-day legitimate stage is, it seems to me, the now inevitable organ. With all its boasted range, I find it more monotonous every time I hear it. The union rule that a minimum number of musicians must be engaged for any show with music is supposed to account for its presence. But how about writing a score for just that small number of players? In Paris the stage composers are getting along with few (to avoid the use of records) and the results are creditable. Milhaud has cut down expenses to one saxophone. Maybe *Macbeth* wouldn't do with just one trumpet but four solo instruments could certainly go places. I'd rather listen to any well selected combination than to all the organs in the world.

## WITH THE DANCERS

EDWIN DENBY

WHEN I saw Agnes de Mille's dancers standing in profile making an arm gesture, it looked so natural it looked just like Margie, Amy and Sue lifting their arms. It looked concrete, as though there was nothing else to it but what you saw; as in a morris dance, they were doing what they were doing and

they were whoever they were. They looked human. It may sound harmless enough, but it was a pleasant surprise. And then it occurred to me that one of the things that have made me uncomfortable at recitals of modern dance groups is the way the dancers seem to disappear as human beings and only function as instruments. When you see six of them on the stage, all you can do is count six, you can't tell six what. They don't seem to be girls combining with other girls, they don't seem to have any human relation to one another. They seem artificially depersonalized, and their bodies operated from off stage. I smell a Führer somewhere, and I get uncomfortable. I wish our dance groups would look as if they were free agents. I wish they would look as if they liked being together, at least as much as folk dancers do, or Lindy-Hoppers.

Well, another thing that makes me uncomfortable with modern groups is that they don't even look as if they enjoyed dancing. We all know that expression of sobriety they wear not only on their face but on their body, too. It covers a group, like an unattractive army blanket. From their programs, from their choreographies, they mean to express all sorts of things; but they don't show them. They seem to be thinking of the next movement as though they were afraid they'd forget it, instead of enjoying the one they are doing while they are doing it. When I think of the natural kind of dancing, or folk dancing, I notice it doesn't express anything but the pleasure of being in a dance. The ballet (and vaudeville dancing too) teach in school to express, to project the natural pleasure in just movement. But the modern schools pay little attention to projection even of this simple pleasure. I think that is a serious weakness as far as appearing on the stage goes. When a dancer learns to show his delight, the audience begins to "understand" him. You cannot understand without liking, and how can the audience like unless the dancer shares his liking with them. But our dance groups set themselves problems in expression far beyond this simple one. They skip it and jump in at the second story. They don't care about your liking, they want you not only to understand, but to believe. They want their movement to awaken your imagination, so that it will join the movement you see to others you consciously or uncon-

sciously remember. This would be really sensational dancing.

Real sensationalism is wonderful, but besides emotional control it requires physical ease. Really sensational dancing will pass through violent shifts of balance without breaking down the body's assurance. The balance is real, you can see it shift back and forth and all the while the body continues moving as a whole. This is what our modern groups expect of themselves and often pretend to be doing; but actually a violent step or gesture upsets the relation of one movement to the next, breaking the dance, forcing it to start up in the middle. Natural dancing avoids this difficulty, limits steps and gestures to amusement, so that the body moves consistently as a whole. But our groups, afraid of being too simple, would rather fake sensationalism even if they leave us with a not quite pleasant feeling afterwards.

I am not trying to "invalidate" the modern dance groups; on the contrary I would like to clear the confused prejudice against them, by pinning down the unfavorable impression they make to specific aspects. We all know they have made discoveries from which the dance world is benefitting. Perhaps the modern dance group should establish its own technical and emotional academy; but that would mean abandoning the semi-professional status which is one of its virtues. Anyway it is interesting that there may be now a tendency toward a new method, toward a more natural and "concrete" style. Besides finding it in Agnes de Mille's group, I thought I saw it too in Anna Sokolow's *Opening Dance* and—though in a more proper form—in Hanya Holm's *Dance Sonata*. These pieces are easier to do, more danced, less sensationalistic. They haven't much propaganda, but in point of propaganda I think our groups will find a warmer audience and their themes will come across with more meaning, when they give more meaning on the stage to what they themselves are: natural young people who enjoy dancing, recognizable Grade A proletarians.

On an excursion to the English Gilbert and Sullivan I found Messrs. Sumner and Dean acting *Cox and Box* in the fine old style of farce, which is almost dancing, with leaps, rushes, whirls, and dyings out of movement. In *Pinafore* Sir Joseph and Captain Corcoran danced with a decorous abandon which was very

funny and subtle, too. Otherwise after the first five minutes of surrealist shock, I found the production appalling. The WPA *Mikado* on the other hand is no mortician's field-day. It is rough, cheerful, and keeps the show going; modernization is natural, pleasant, and doesn't try too hard.

I have just read Lifar's book of lectures at the Sorbonne, called *La danse*, which has recently appeared in English too (Putnam, London, 1938). I recommend it among other things for its lively remarks on the ballet technic of past centuries, and for its many (once in a while contradictory) opinions on ballet music. It is rare to find a dancer who is at all intelligible on the subject. And although some of the opinions are astonishing, a friendly musician can glean a good deal about what dance music sounds like to a dancer, and what it doesn't sound like. Where Lifar criticizes dancing I disagreed angrily with his scorn of Nijinski and Nijinska as choreographers, but thought his praise of Fokine and Massine discerning. No wonder a young man with so many violent opinions gets a bad press. Still, opinionated or not, the book is never silly or vain. And people who like dancers will appreciate that the brief reminiscences of his own beginnings could only have been remembered by a dancer.

Kreutzberg reappeared this month, and he is undoubtedly the finest modern technician among the men. He is as agreeable and as wistful as ever, the well-brought-up Town Hall audience liked him very much, and to say more would be to point out special technical excellencies of his limpid and decorative style. The program of the Mordkin Ballet I saw made me appreciate Massine's choreographies the more; though Miss Bowman's toe technic and projection technic knocks you flat. I also saw the praiseworthy WPA production of a Doris Humphreys program. It would be well worth while if the Dance Project could reproduce more choreographies. A good dance gets better the more often you see it, and also the more often you dance it. A good dance gets better and a bad one worse, and either way it's a good thing for everybody. I'm sorry I missed the *Blackbirds*. The best thing I saw in the theatre was the wonderful vaudeville scene in *Stars in Your Eyes* where Ethel Merman and Jimmy Durante tell each other the worst jokes they can think of. There

must be a lesson for dancers, too, in the scene, because it makes you happy remembering it.

## ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

By GEORGE ANTHEIL

NO one can deny that endless stretches of musical waste and cliché sound off from the majority of Hollywood films. But there is an important extenuating circumstance. Hollywood music is a high-pressure affair. The studios each produce from fifteen to eighteen pictures a year and some as many as eighty. The composer can be allowed only one or two weeks to complete a gigantic score and since, moreover, most U. S. films cost from \$300,000 to \$1,500,000 a piece, the gigantic investments must not be endangered by music too new or experimental whose audience-reaction has not been previously investigated.

Now turn to the European side of the picture business. The largest studios over there seldom produce more than ten films a year and the average can be much more accurately placed at four. So the composer may take months to write his score if he feels he needs that much time. And since European pictures seldom cost over \$150,000 each there is less at stake. European producers can afford to experiment with new musical solutions for old movie problems, in general to allow their composers infinitely more leeway. Who is to say that under such heavenly conditions Hollywood composers also would not produce better music? Considering the circumstances it is amazing how good their scores are, as is.

What I think fantastic is that the European motion picture scores are not better than they are. The new European films are very interesting, if for no other reason, because they show how the European composer now confronts these problems of mass-production which are day by day inevitably coming to be his own. For Europe is stepping up the production of motion pictures—often by state decree—and in so doing is bound eventually to step upon the composers' toes in much the same manner that Hollywood has long and steadily exerted that pressure. It will now be in-