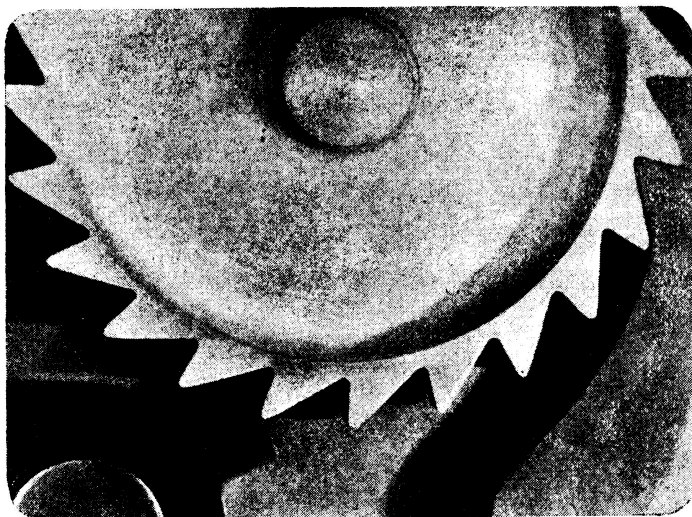


FORECAST AND REVIEW

PIONEERS OF MOVIE MUSIC

A GAIN the *Ballet Mécanique*, but this time sans Antheil, a ballet of the screen, with pistons for dancers, the *battements* of levers, the *pirouettes* of fly-wheels, *glissades* of worm-gears, *fouettés* of pendula and *jetés*, *cabrioles* and *entrechats* of spring-



From the film, *MECHANICAL PRINCIPLES*, by RALPH STEINER

ing valves. Of such matter was the stimulating program offered at the Copland-Sessions Concert at the Broadhurst Theatre on March 15th.

Opening with *Actualités*—an impressionistic news-reel to a score by Milhaud, it continued with *Surf and*

Seaweed, a film by Ralph Steiner with music by Marc Blitzstein. Then came a concert performance of excerpts from Roger Sessions' *Black Maskers* and Aaron Copland's *Music for the Theatre*, the latter already familiar to New York audiences. Finally two more films by Steiner, *Mechanical Principles* and *H₂O*, both with music by Colin McPhee, and the gaily satiric *P'tite Lilie*, scored by Milhaud, "the cinematographic day-dream of a midinette seen through a dishcloth."

Dancers, stage directors, painters and musicians all attended the occasion to seek novelty of form, motion and design in this imaginative regrouping of the arts. For the dancer there were rhythmic invention, new accents, strange freedoms of motion. For the painter those fundamentals of abstraction generic to canvases by Kandinsky, Bracque, Klee, Picasso, the mechanics of Picabia and the two dimensional translations of impeti and rhythms that actuate the sculpture of Brancusi. For almost every art there was supplied a healthy opportunity to take fresh stock of its component elements. Thus the dance appeared as the application and grouping of physical motion; music in such an analysis became the ordered employment of rhythm and sound, and painting the designed combination of line, mass and color.

To the film creator especially, new vistas were opened. The slave of realism, the purveyor of every day, he finds stretching before him vast fields of the imagination. That sign-post of creative fantasy, once so splendidly indicative in the *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, has again appeared before us, thanks to the artistic curiosity of Mr. Steiner. It is entirely conceivable that the future may beget emotion from motion, aphrodisiac reaction from hypo-mechanical movement and spiritual elevation from abstract forms of beauty. What endless tales lie locked in the micro-world, what strange loveliness in the commonplace. Of these Mr. Steiner has given us an inkling.

And for that most unhappy of artists, the composer, is there not perhaps a fresh gleam of hope? For a public suckled on the love-strains of Tchaikowsky, who know the leitmotive of the Garbo by the inevitable melodic cue from Grieg, a public satiated with the theme songs of lovers dying on the desert to symphonic orchestral accompaniments, there is still the opportunity of hearing music actually requisite to the film and especially created for it. Despite one or two marked exceptions, such as the score adapted for *Caligari* and that accompanying Emil Jannings' *Patriot*, for the most part music for the films heard in America has been a painful reiteration of overplayed tunes, hackneyed in their moving picture connotation. If then the gods of this industry would bestow their lavish favors wisely on those chosen to do film accompaniments, what chance might a composer not have

of doing interesting original work and, for the first time since the days of royal patronage, with ample remuneration. The commercial theatre does it—why not the film?

The program presented at the Broadhurst showed to the listener not confused by visual and aural coincidence, clearly defined differences of style. Blitzstein's score had a lean simplicity and instrumental economy completely in character with contemporary composition. Savoring of the small orchestra rather than of symphonic complexity it gave an excellent commentary on the film and was, at all times, more than mere background and not in the genre of representational music.

The music Colin McPhee composed for *Mechanical Principles* and *H₂O*, unlike that of the Blitzstein work, called for the fullest use of the thirty Philharmonic players under Hugh Ross's baton. Its richness and brilliance recalled an earlier day of orchestration, when large orchestras were not prohibitive. Nevertheless in substance it was thoroughly of the day and proved a most adequate and, at times, beautiful setting for these films.

Unhappily a lack of synchronization robbed the music of some of its most apposite effects particularly in the two McPhee scores, where in *H₂O* the conductor finished considerably in advance of the film and in *Mechanical Principles* where the utmost precision of accent is required. One must suppose that this was the result of that pitiful condition of which modern music is frequently the victim, lack of sufficient rehearsal. But when the phonofilms shall eliminate tonal distortion, it can be done, without danger of accident, on the film itself with better results.

The two orchestra works, *The Black Maskers* and *Music for the Theatre* displayed diversity of style. The Sessions work, however, showed a tendency to wander and appeared more youthful than the colorful and effective Copland score. In his *Music for the Theatre*, Aaron Copland makes brilliant use of the Broadway idiom and shows himself better equipped to blend those two contrasts, jazz and so-called classical music, than has been demonstrated in other and better-known works. Mr. Copland has a style which is thoroughly American, a technic as a rule possessed only by European composers. In this respect and in what they had to say, all the Americans on the program could well stand

comparison with the best contemporary effort of the young Europeans.

A spicy *bonne bouche* was offered in Darius Milhaud's witty score to the Cavalcanti film, *La P'tite Lilie*, the story of the little midinette who left her sewing and her daisies to follow a life of sin at the instigation of the "Brute" who led her astray, lived upon her unhappy earnings and at length foully stabbed her to death before carving himself a hearty lunch from a melon with the fatal blade. Throughout, one sensed a strange nostalgia for the Hollywood "super-film" of the not so long ago. The Milhaud score, characteristically, was redolent of gay foolishness, tangy sarcasm and good-humored blague.

Richard Hammond

DANCERS OF THE SEASON

WHAT are the chances for an American Ballet? The question has come up periodically during the last few years; it seems today pertinent as never before. The American public appears to have become suddenly dance-conscious; it attends recitals given by foreign and native dancers, in the huge numbers and with the conscientious enthusiasm manifested some years ago for the visiting lecturer. Who are the dancers who supply the demand in this new movement—which has taken hold here at the very moment when a similar one is fast ebbing in Germany—and what are the possibilities for an integrated ballet which shall be America's own?

Those who for the last two seasons have grouped themselves under the name of the Dance Repertory Theatre, are, with one or two outside the circle, the best we have. They are Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Tamiris, and their groups; and Agnes De Mille with Warren Leonard. The getting-together idea—whether as economic merger, artistic amalgam, or simply dance-festival—is, I think, definitely a failure. There is no hope for a combined ballet; the dancers are too individual and too little connected in attitude. Economically the idea is poor; a person who might be pleased to attend one dance-recital is frightened out of his wits at the prospect of nine in a row. Continuity and individuality were sacrificed to a