

teenth century, who was obsessed by demons, death and corrosion. This is definitely program music, but it is deliberate, sophisticated, naïve and poetic as Bach. The last movement with its chorale that finally triumphs over the demoniacal figurations is a parallel to the *Wachet Auf* chorus of Bach, where the strings, poor foolish virgins, vacillate innocently beneath a grave and warning chorale for the singers. The foundations for this neo-mediaeval work are to be seen in Hindemith's *Marienleben*, which has always seemed to me to be the com-

poser's confession of faith.

Walton's *Concerto for Violin* (Victor) is the perfect anonymous concert-piece. A brilliant, ecstatic violin part gives Heifetz a chance to soar beautifully above an elegant orchestra. The work is emotional and rhapsodic, sensitive and highly polished, but completely uninteresting.

Stokowski performs Morton Gould's *Guaracha* (Victor), a hard-boiled item if ever there was one, and the *Scherzo* from Paul Creston's *Symphony, Opus 20* (Columbia).

## ON THE FILM FRONT

By LÉON KOCHNITZKY

**I**N the present circumstances, the Film Front is no longer a metaphorical expression. It has a real existence, even a strategy and a characteristic technic. Its aims are co-ordinated. The building up and the working of the gigantic American war machine are to be explained to the civilian population. The "factual shorts" already produced by the Office of Emergency Management Film Unit are the first achievements of this new Front.

It is important that a nation at war should be told how its war machines are built and of what they are made. *Aluminum*, *Bomber* and *Tanks* are very efficient documentary pictures. Is their efficiency increased by the musical treatment? The O.E.M.'s scores seem too often to be playing first role in the action and more than once they overrun the whole show, even when the musical continuity is scarce and the form and expression are only so-so. There is an endless "mickeymousing"

of the action. Tank and bomber are depicted in sound and rhythms; close your eyes to the screen and you can easily detect them. This is the proper way of treating the Fox and the Crow, or the Big Bad Wolf and Donald Duck. But not the tank and the bomber in which men risk their lives for the sake of civilization. Such machines should be handled with care by musicians. The best that can be done, perhaps, is to let them "speak for themselves," in their own fearful, atonal language, which could be sonorized as a low, rumbling accompaniment without the help of brasses and percussions. Of course, the O. E. M. is not the first "Mickeymouser" of machines and engines. Arthur Honegger in *Pacific 231* and Mossolov and Prokofiev have also overworked that device, and it can be traced back to Richard Wagner himself. The descent of Wotan and Loki from the home of the gods down to Niebelheim in *Rheingold* is nothing but

the mickeymousing of the Niebelungen's anvils and hammers.

The score for Garson Kanin's *Ring of Steel*, O.E.M.'s latest, shows a better grasp of the function of music in such productions. Morton Gould is content to stand aside, underlining with discreet melodic comment this beautiful, swift pageant of American history. The big musical feature of *Ring of Steel* is Spencer Tracy's harmonious, deep and impressive utterance, so unlike the usual documentary declamation. The perfect sonorization of the voice is a real achievement, and an important element in this splendid picture.

For *Men and Ships* Gail Kubik had a far easier task. The protagonist here is really the sea, and the sea gives more to music than all the toils and travails of mankind; especially when it is silent and calm. Men and ships are mere accidents when the spectator's vision is entirely focussed on the sea. The best way of making the picture effective as an exaltation of marine training would have been to leave the principal role to the sea, and to the music. Thus only could the emotional sensitivity of the film-goer be touched. This has not been accomplished, for here are too many words and not enough music, which is a pity, because Kubik's score is good. Although it does not bring anything new to the field of film music, and it shows recognizable Mussorgsky influence, it is a very agreeable piece of work, well constructed, well balanced and well orchestrated. It possesses real charm, it gives authentic musical satisfaction. But how difficult to enjoy! The producers have left the music in a sort of shadowy background whence it emerges from time to time, like a seal in a pool. Unpleasant

as it is to have one's attention fixed on bad music, it is still more deceiving not to be able to follow an interesting and attractive score.

### III

"Music makes the things shown on the screen more effective." In these words, Aaron Copland introduced the excerpts from Hollywood fiction films presented by the League of Composers last month. In much the same way, a hatter might certainly say: "Hats make men walking in the street more effective." And members of the League of Hatters would also have cheered him. An impartial observer would probably remark that it all depends on whether the hats fit the men who wear them. It is rather a sad record that, of all the excerpts from scores presented, one only out of seven "made the picture more effective." Copland himself was the composer. In the two sequences taken from *Of Mice and Men*, music creates the dramatic intensity of an every-day situation. A young woman feels depressed by her loneliness on a ranch. She does not complain by word or gesture. Nobody tells us about her dreary life. Nobody except the musician. A short waltz-theme, infinitely repeated by the cello and the low keys of the piano suggests the mood of the actress. In the next, when the same girl tries to seduce the wretched hero of Steinbeck's story, the waltz phrase develops into varied modulations and passes from one instrument to another, till it finally skims lightly over the guitar. All this is achieved with an extreme economy of means and tones. And the peculiar sound of a spoon in a glass filled with water and ice-cubes contributes to the general effect. Indeed, this is the kind of music that makes the picture more ef-

fective, because it is neither a decorative comment on the action, nor a translation into sound of what happens, nor a sentimental background created to support the action and render the listener more receptive. It is part of the action. And without Copland's music, the two sequences would not exist. They would be practically incomprehensible.

George Antheil's music for *Once in a Blue Moon* touched me personally by its Parisian air. It brought back the Diaghilev productions of the late twenties. The musician's inspiration is fresh, whimsical cheerful. He plunges into highbrow polytonality and suddenly gives way to a rather commonplace street song. It is nearly always music, and sometimes it is even good. But it does not seem to be necessarily connected with the film, and although I feel charmed by his melodic invention, I cannot subscribe to Antheil's way of treating the film as an opportunity to "place" an agreeable score that could serve any other occasion as well.

The other excerpts presented the same evening had scores by Louis Gruenberg, Bernard Herrmann, Werner Janssen, Erich Korngold and Ernst Toch. Even if they have not found a definitive solution for the problems of screen-music these composers show that they know their job. Each one makes some lucky hits, such as the Schubert evocation in *So Ends Our Night* (Gruenberg), where a youth imprisoned in a Nazi jail, on hearing one of his companions whistling the

*Moment Musical* remembers his mother playing the piece in happier days. An excellent musical feature is also to be found in *Citizen Kane* (Herrmann), during a farcical singing lesson given to a tone-deaf lady by a grotesque Italian maestro. In both cases the musicians enrich the picture with effective details. Still one cannot say their music belongs to the action. More dramatic power is developed by Korngold in his score for *Juarez*, and by Ernst Toch in *Ladies in Retirement*. But a film-transposition of Italian *Verismo* brings to Hollywood all the bad taste and heavy sentimentality of *La Tosca* and *I Pagliacci*, and modern harmonization adds nothing to it. An impression is created by sensitiveness and quality of soul rather than by purely technical measures.

### III

For *King's Row*, Korngold has written a very important score. A real effort to avoid the defect of his past works may be noticed. Here is no mere commercial filler but a long studied, well meditated work. It is necessary to recognize in a score of this kind the "purity of the intention," even if the music is not altogether satisfactory. The Germanic romanticism that pervades the score is not always unpleasant. The sequence of the "Kinderscene" for instance is charming. But, alas, who shall deliver Erich Korngold and the Hollywood producers from those two fearful enemies, the Viennese *Gemüth* and the Berlinesse *Kitsch*?

## IN THE THEATRE

By SAMUEL L. M. BARLOW

I HEARD two American operas for the first time recently. One was a revival, one a world premiere. I wanted desperately to like them both, partly out