

somehow seems filtered through Debussy; it is less successful.

For a new low in film music hear what Kosma has done to *The Human Beast*. There is nothing here which doesn't come under the heading of cheap and dull. Often both the music and the reasons for its inclusion are completely incomprehensible. Perhaps it's due in part to censorship of the scenes which allegedly would stir criminal degenerates to action, but I doubt that the uncut music track had anything good in it. The charming rhythms that trains make running along the tracks and their hollow roaring as they pass through tunnels are the only excusable sounds in the film outside of the dialogue. Most of the music reminds me of the Indian stuff in old Westerns, only it's not quite so good. They used to play Grieg's *March of the Dwarfs*.

The Baker's Wife is so deservedly popular that I suppose I can mention it. What little music there is was written by one Vincent Scotto and is all right. There are gay rustic tunes, singing and some piccolos shrilling in chorus. Sometimes the recording sounds like what comes

out of an old 16 mm. sound projector, but that's the way French pictures are. For me the loveliest spot of sound was the realism of the village church-bell calling the population to morning mass: the slow preliminary tolls and then the quick clanging, while actually of the same ethnographical interest as the chime of a cafeteria's ticket-box in an American film, nevertheless give a great lift to the soundtrack.

III

We have a new horror to contend with. The worst film-music conceivable doesn't compare with what goes on during a television dramatic broadcast. Constant improvisation on the Novachord beneath the dialogue, so that all conversation sounds as if it were taking place on the Main Floor at Wanamaker's during the daily recital. Unbelievably bad. It seems that in September television may go commercial. It will be fun to see in what way the quality of the broadcasts can be lowered to suit the purposes of the companies advertising through the medium. Of course there's also the possibility that going commercial will help. We'll see.

WITH THE DANCERS

By PETER LINDAMOOD

KATHERINE DUNHAM is the first big news in the Negro dance. By virtue of taste, research and talent, she has produced a professional ballet which transmutes the scattered Negro rhythmic expression from its various regional idioms to formal theatre communication. Wherever he is—Africa, Haiti, Cuba, Southern United States or Harlem—the Negro retains a highly individual-

ized eroticism. Through pre-eminent muscularity he achieves acute atmosphere. Miss Dunham as a student realizes this basic capacity and as a dancer illustrates it. She simply puts her amazing body and sly, sensitive soul smack in the middle of things and then coaxes from her group every shred of writhe, shimmy, strut, stretch, yawn, somnolent enticement and clamorous viscera.

The torrid tropical dances were on the marimba-ish side. That's all right too, since the simplest gourd-click makes so many things happen in Dunham's hips and heel-toe-heel slither. The most memorable number was, oddly enough her tenderest — a *Bahiana* which began as a subtle tango on the pianos in the pit, and carried its insinuation after the curtain rise to a semicircle of men plinck-plucking a heat-retreat rhythm. Dunham swaying marvelously in the coils of a winding rope hurled across stage by Archie Savage, during it all "delivered" an enchanting native song, a sweet-hot teaser. The jazz-hot section was equally good excepting perhaps the jitterbug montage finale which so far is too fast and loose. Incidentally what an amazing stylistic quick-change for the dancers. Really they can do anything! Dunham and Savage did a sizzling little portrait in gut-bucket, old style, a *Barrel House Florida Swamp Shimmy*; two rakish dancers did a cake-walk that revitalized the *Dark Town Strutter's Ball* and finally the whole group did a wonderfully youthful square dance. The music here was recorded tunes (hick); against it a nasal female voice (Dunham's) gave an illusion of spontaneity by calling out the figures in an aimless progression.

By way of comparison we had the long, noisy, libretto-crazy *Zunguru* of Asadata Dafora. This seems to be the same old *Kykunkor* of several years back but in the meantime all the natives have been to Harlem. It is the peculiar wit of their dancer-student-director to reverse this hegira and give us a Harlem blade, of spurious rhythmic identity, doing the native's return on a grand scale. The central dance was effective theatre with its semicircle of voodoo warriors juxta-

posed to a kind of duke-of-Harlem caricature, but the rest was all disorder and yelp.

The Ballet Russe spring engagement was spotty. With the exception of Nini Theilade's unsuccessful *Clouds*, there were no new works. The loss of many young stars has seriously narrowed the repertory, which leaned heavily on the 1910 side. Massine was quite omnipresent and his style and influence are so extremely personal as to seem a large dose of sore thumb. *Boutique Fantastique* and *Beau Danube* are still dazzling, so too are his first three symphonies. But in *Bogatyr* with its dusty attempt at Contes Russes, and *St. Francis* which confuses classic austerity with over-simplification, and finally the lazy, watery *Capriccio Espagnol*, Massine's idiosyncrasy reaches a high and super-wasteful point. Argentinita dancing opposite Massine for one guest performance of the *Capriccio* pulled the ballet together considerably. The clear tones of her castanets and her intense folk portraiture created that aura of inscrutability which is essential to all Spanish dancing and which was never present on the night when Mia Slavenska had the role (her tremendous Nordic lyricism gets in the way). This quality which Argentinita has is also much abused. During her own long colorful concert, amid the indiscriminate fervor of reverent olés, I searched for some plastic bite or outline. But after three or four numbers had made clear her musicianship, the dance-in-space ceased to exist and my attention lagged. Folk content appears devitalized after it settles into such limited portions of the native himself as the eyes (hermetically sultry), the shoulder blades and the fingers. The fabulous Carmelita Maracci has that per-

fect quotient of dynamism and muscularity which can translate intimate regional nuance into large patterns of racial force. The late Argentina had it too in a different way. But this I missed in Argentina's program.

However two great events made the Ballet Russe season worth while. First there was Markova's brilliant performance of the romantic-classic *Giselle*. She danced it with Youskevitch, outstanding in the present company for javelin-sharpness and line, later with Dolin, guest artist from the Ballet Theatre, whose full-blown romantic quality made a wonderful combine with her unrivaled artistry. *Giselle* is now back at the pinnacle from which it fell after Pavlova.

Thankfully *Baiser de la Fée* has been rescued from the tragic oblivion that seems the fate of all Balanchine-Stravinsky ballets. When there are dancers sufficient to the role, Balanchine's classic conceptions take on heroic sculptural form. But now the suspicion that Balanchine's contempt for his dancers leads to impossible experimentalism has been set right by the performances of Slavenska and Eglevsky in *Baiser*. Their adagio in the third scene is the acme of linear classicism — see and never forget its ending with the youth in an extended position of ultimate recline, the implacable fairy snared into a backward, trusting swoon. Eglevsky's solo and variations symbolizing the flaunted prime of youth were dazzling. Balanchine has Olympian conceptions of human tenderness and a belief in the classical ballet as the highest exploitation thereof. He surprises unexpected depths of wonder out of the twoness or threeness of the dancers, achieving a profound architecture from out of their straining coquetry, their cumulative

muscular rapport. The final scene, the Berceuse of the Eternal Spheres, is inspired — the youth caught now in the coils of the net, lunges toward the superdistant fairy eloquently deliberating from side to side.

I am glad I saw the long, industrious concert of Margaret Severn, her first in many years after a sabbatical in that hearts-and-flower bed of the American interpretive dancer, Paris, France. She has kept intact dances that reflect an epoch just passed but already forgotten, which show how the landscape lay after the post-Fokine decadence of ballet via motion picture houses. While Wigman's *Hexentanz* was creating a new tradition in Europe most of the dancers later influenced by her were discreet dabblers in Nautch hands, Lotus seats and shoddy Greek or Scheherezade midrifts. The actual dances were of the double speed, piqué turn ballet studio variety with, bop on top of this, a goofy carbon of St. Denis and Isadora, or even a third very special influence consisting almost exclusively of the Bakst harem-skirt immortalized by Fokina. . . . Miss Severn danced beautifully, with amazing control in her ballet work, and gave great dignity to numbers which otherwise had merely lawn-fete insignificance. Hers are the dance world's longest and most plastic hands, a clue to her unique success with masks. Masks are a tremendous release for the body if the body is especially eloquent and mimetic itself. An early piece of Copland's turned up as *Feline Adventures*. It had great charm but lacked floor plan. This aimlessness in space seems to be the period's most incredible failing.

Lotte Goslar, the dance-mime from

Germany, appeared in an intimate concert of low-comedy and wistful-tragic sketches. Since her debut here three seasons ago in Erika Mann's unforgettable Pepper Mill revue, Goslar has trained a small group of dancers. She inherits the tradition of the Fratellinis and the lamented Grok, which has as logical a relation to the modern ballet as the *Commedia dell'Arte* and the *Chauve Souris* to the classic. Mordant, pathetic or plain, her numbers have the fullest content of laughter of any dancer now except possibly Angna Enters. Hers is the realm of the awkward-graceful, the "carried away" or "inspired," the hopeful "goon." *Waltz Mania* is a heartrending comment, the dull girl's libido being more perpetual than her motion. *Fille de Joie* and the *Virgin* (omitted on this program) are two of the most effective statements on social misery to be carved out of the dance form. Her *Childhood Memories*, the best group number, showed some disconcertingly infantile adults assaulting, in its bath, a child terrifyingly adult — better if possible than the knitting midget in Dali's *Bacchanale*.

With Ted Shawn's retirement this season, the future of his group of boys becomes a matter of some conjecture. For years his programs have been completely unimportant artistically. But of all the experimenters he has most successfully

projected the athlete into the formal dance. The group has vigorous unity, and for unvarying clarity of line is second only to the present male nucleus of the Ballet Russe. Out of this band has come a young Southern dancer, Foster Fitz-Simmons, who has teamed up with Miriam Winslow "toward a new dance." There is not much new in it yet but plenty of excellent dancing. Fitz-Simmons has a truly superb body but he has yet to shake off the appalling thrall of Shawn's special non-sectarian "religion in the dance." (If anything was ever a cult and a bad one this is it. It means invariable death to choreography.) But his beautiful suite, *South Singing*, three pastorate promenades to Mountain Negro and Creole songs, were lyrical and still quite as male as any rotarian could demand.

To conclude with a bit of news. John Latouche, the young author of last winter's smash hit *Ballad for Americans*, has just completed a serio-comic text on *Susanna and the Elders* which has been set as a cantata by Jerome Moross after the revered Isaac Watt's Hymnal. The plan is to develop *Susanna* into a choral ballet, with a Wednesday night Prayer Meeting atmosphere. Think of *Dwellin' in Beulah Land* as choreography. The rapsallion dynamics of Eugene Loring should perfectly fit *Susanna and the Elders*.