

Eglevski's when he lands. He is very fine.

But it is Gibson, of the Ballet Theatre who wins the hearts this year, because you watch what looks like a great star just emerging. What's new for a lyric star too is that he hasn't the 1930 Russian mannerism of a certain greasy sexiness. So far he is at his best only in *Aurora's Wedding* and in *Naughty Lisette* (*La fille mal gardée*). But his *Spectre of the Rose* is more promising than any recent one has been. He has the gift for the poetry of leaping, and the basic trick of stopping in midair; now he is teaching himself to continue dancing on the ground, too. Best of all he begins to show personal imagination and personal dance rhythm. He and Miss Conrad and Miss Lyon seem to be the only ones who are learning this fundamental of style from the great example of Markova; as in the other company Krassovska has learned her freer rhythm from Danilova's example.

It is quite right for the management of Ballet Theatre to be developing its better dancers by rotating the solo roles.

I hope it can also do something to give the ensemble more real style. (The Monte Carlo still is the better company in that respect.) A sense of style in the ensemble is what really brings a ballet to life. Style is the expression of the secret meaning of the piece as far as it relates to the individual dancer, in that way it is the dancer's deportment. In another way, it is the question of giving a phrase of dancing an edge or vivacity by timing the point of emphasis — as in reciting poetry. Virgil Thomson who saw a performance of *Swan Lake* in which Markova was magnificent told me that in the old days with the magnificent Doubrovskaya in the part he had not had so sharp a sense of a distinction between star and chorus; in style they were related to her style, they were all enchanted swans. The ensemble of the Ballet Theatre are accurate technically, they are lively and pleasant and goodlooking. But nobody has yet taught them classical deportment, which is delicate and grand and personal; it also allows the girls a special femininity which would be interesting.

## FILMS AND THEATRE

BY PAUL BOWLES

THE *World at War* is one of the better propaganda pictures and has one of the better soundtracks. The copy I saw (in upper New York State) suffered from frequent cuts, so that sometimes it was impossible to understand even the commentary. However, the logic of its sequences seemed straight enough. Naturally it is a task to make background music for a conversation between a group

of dive-bombers and several anti-aircraft guns. The sound-effect carries the day nearly every time, as against the music. The important thing would therefore seem to be to write music which sounds so much like the noises covering it that the ear will not find it too easy to detect any disparity between the two: protective tonal coloring. Anything to avoid that symphonic strain over which suddenly

spreads a curtain of motor noises as the planes rise into the sky. (This I admit to be one valid dramatic solution to the problem, but by no means the only one.) Gail Kubik has done a good job, but one feels he was not in on the scenario or the cutting. But then, how often is the composer? Does the director or compiler, outside of musical pictures, ever work from an integrated scenario, as precise as an opera score, with every word of the dialogue or commentary set to a definite measure of the score? That is obviously often the only way to make a good sound-track, and it is just as obvious that no one but the composer wants to do it. However *The World at War* was made, it is pretty choppy. This is unfortunate, because the musical material is of the straightforward, hard-hitting variety, with good basic rhythms guaranteed to catch immediately the interest in any given sequence. The trouble is one is often let down when the rhythm is drowned by noises or when it is simply cut off by the commentary. What seem to be actual newsreel sound-tracks are interspersed without esthetic casualties. The Japanese baseball game is charming. There is a funeral march for Pearl Harbor. The paraphrasing of Brahms while the Nazis sleep along the roads of France, struck me as the best bit.

If it were my function to comment upon extra-musical messages conveyed by films, I could be indignant at greater length than I can here about the *Battle of Midway*. Considered as a film used for propaganda purposes by a great nation at war, it is lamentably ineffective. Aside from the expected technical defects inevitable in a document made during the heat of battle (defects which incidentally might have been turned into

virtues by more awareness in the cutting-room) the film is as trite and depressing a bit of flag-waving as one could hope to see, even in time of war. It is unfortunate that John Ford had access only to a color camera, because the resulting hues are those of a Kodachrome reproduction in a copy of the *National Geographic Magazine*, vintage of 1925. There are no screen-credits for the music, for which someone must be grateful, for if the film is operatta-like, chauvinistic and infantile in its approach to the war, the music catches up with it in lack of planning, silliness and bad taste. Thus we get things like a sky of bomb-puffs painted by Tanguy, with the *Star-Spangled Banner* flanked by the humming of motors. We also have *Onward, Christian Soldiers* (but wouldn't a purely Aryan army appreciate it more than ours?) When there is no place for commentary or motors, a sudden, sweet symphonic bit is interpolated for an instant and then ruthlessly truncated for a new five-second airplane-motor passage. Each sequence resembles what goes on musically during the captions in a newsreel, the difference being that the newsreel themes have cadences. If we are in this war for any purpose at all, it is to rid the world of its irrational ideological heritage. Nothing in this dangerous film suggests that the struggle involves anything more than the rapid annihilation of the present political enemies of the United States of America.

The much-touted *Mrs. Miniver* is another picture full of the noises of war. It is difficult for most of us to know, as yet, how near to or how far from reality all these sounds are, that we take so much for granted in present-day movies. We can only accept or question the word of

technicians and war initiates. As to their esthetic value, however, aside from direct functions such as the growing or diminishing volume of airplane motors serving as a kind of gauge to the imminence of death, or the emotional impact of explosions used as punctuation for a scene, it seems to me that such noises have yet to be put successfully to use through incorporation into the dramatic and musical fabric. Here these sounds are quite mellow in tone, and sometimes even seem neither dubbed nor like a percussion section. The score by Herbert Stothart has the regular overstuffed, plush tonality of Hollywood. Part of the monotony of the American film comes from the leveling influence of music which provides the same luxurious ambiance for all kinds of scenes. The Ravel instrumental cloak always offers expensive-sounding comfort, especially when it is used to cover musical-comedy tunes. And why, whenever a cat is shown on the screen, must the sound-track carry a very unfeline, — or if feline in sound, untimely — meow?

*This Is The Enemy*, from the Lenfilm Studies, is a collection of shorts about the Nazis, and each section is the work of a different director. Some have considerable interest one way and another, but never musically. It is badly recorded, marching scenes are shown to music in marked waltz meter. In the Jugoslavian sequence there is one good passage for 'cello, trumpet and snare-drum.

On the other hand, *Soviet Border*, a less recent Lenfilm production, besides being adult, has a score. It is by Pushkov, and is pretty well mitred into the dialogue and sound-effects. In general the musical background is scanty, a characteristic which has come to be associated with a

good film score. And there are grateful, dramatic silences. As usual, the Russians break into spontaneous and harmonized singing. One of these songs, used as a *leitmotif*, sounds very much like the *Lied der Einheitsfront* of Eisler, but isn't. There is another one which is reminiscent of our own colonial *Peter Grey*. Pushkov's favorite chord seems to be the diminished third, and he is also fond of elaborate trumpet fanfares. A Mongolian plays a nice piece on an indigenous violin.

*Jacare*, Frank Buck's newest object-lesson in nature for the kiddies, is all about caimans in the Amazon, and he has a score by Miklos Rosza, specialist in exoticisms, which runs throughout the seventy minutes of the film. The never-stopping symphonic score is indispensable in films like this, without continuity of plot, or even the verisimilitude which is the *sine qua non* of documentary films. A travel theme which is used for going up the river into caiman-land and back down again on the return trip, combines the vamp of *Dardanella*, an Augustin Lara tune, the orchestration of *Bolero*, and a rumba rhythm section with maracas and claves. Along the way there are animal *leitmotifs* which are used as literal musical underlining for their visual counterparts: a bass sax tune for peccaries, a string meow-piece for a jaguar, piccolos and oboes playing minor seconds and ninths for monkeys, and so on. In fights between beasts of different species this system leads to thematic complications which are solved by adding augmented triads ascending the whole-tone scale in the brass section. It is unfortunate that the commentator's diction has the precision of a grammar-school child reciting a badly learned lesson; it is often im-

possible to understand.

Sol Kaplan has the screen credits for *Tales of Manhattan*. The score is a Californian commodity of the kind whose output must be one-a-day. It begins with lots of harp-vomit, which is probably not the composer's fault since that dish seems to be a permanent one on the American cinema menu. The Sherry-Netherlands is shown to a special arrangement of *An American in Paris*. There is a love scene with some solo violin-playing, a comedy scene with animated cartoon music, and nice *Salomé* memories for the best bit of the picture: when Ginger Rogers decides to capture Henry Fonda. There is also Charles Laughton playing the part of a composer who conducts his *Bacchanale Moderne* in (Grauman's) Carnegie Hall, but the role's very conception is as much an insult to the profession as the subsequent Negro sequence is to that race. Here the Hall Johnson choir makes some pleasant sounds, pitted against a very insistent wind-machine. At the last minute Paul Robeson strikes an attitude, and the whole thing becomes a musical, with palm-out hand-waving and other devotional gestures. You even have Chinese music in this amazing film, but I mean the good old Chinky-Chinky kind with the winds playing apoggiature in fourths. I think the harp-vomit is the worst, though, and it's certainly not restricted to *Tales of Manhattan*.

Ballet, like opera and acrobatics, needs to be seen in the flesh. It is a non-realistic, virtuoso action, and it must look prodigious to look true. Nothing, except perhaps factual recordings of events, can really be prodigious in the cinema because the cinema is a medium which lends an air of complete realism to even

the most unlikely fantasy. So you have your dancer, who needs the formal frame of the stage, fished out of fantasy and plunked into realism. Close-ups of his grimacings and gesticulations are a further insult. (Thus Massine, in the filmed version of *Gaité Parisienne*, looks just like Eddie Cantor.) Dance figures are cut into or prolonged at will. The familiar tension between musicians and dancers, one of the principal problems in ballet (and how beautiful it is when satisfyingly solved) is gone. In its place is an invisible orchestra, mechanically synchronized. One feels that each down-beat has been blooped in the sound-track and made to fit a foot touching the floor. There is also the question of the ballet score's having been written with the fact in mind that the audience sees the entire ballet from one vantage-point. In the film that point changes every few seconds (it would be just as bad if it didn't, - probably much worse) while the music, made clumsy by the visual hopping about, lumbers on. It is like watching someone try to fit a Mercator's Projection of the World around a globe.

#### IN THE THEATRE

There really is nothing to say about the *Rosalinda* of the New Opera Company. God only knows why the critics liked it. Perhaps *they* thought the brash production fitting to *Fledermaus*, or the cheap, tinselly costumes humorous in the right way, or the slick Broadway orchestration an improvement on the original. But even they could not possibly have liked the acting. Miss Virginia Mac Watters as Adele did most of the good singing. Her diction enabled you to get the full force of the English lyrics. These in general were completely repulsive, as

witness the text of the theme song and third act finale:

"Oh, Jiminy, oh, Jiminy!  
What joy to be forever free.  
Oh, Jiminy! Sweet Liberty,  
We sing in praise of thee!"

Balanchine's choreography was well-nigh indistinguishable from the rush of the crowd on the stage packed with people. In the drunk ballet one could at least see what was going on. Because of the crudely coy performances, and probably also because of the typical Straussian lack of harmonic variety, all the songs had a tendency to sound alike. The playful period sets by Oliver Smith and the melodies were more or less of a piece: they were gay and diverting. The rest of the production hadn't the distinction of an old-time vaudeville act.

Masine put Revueltas at a disadvantage in *Don Domingo*, the ballet he pieced together for the Ballet Theatre out of old scores by that Mexican composer. The impression given was one of not very competent collage. Practically all of Revueltas is genre music, which, more than any other kind of music, has to be left alone in its context if it is to retain its meaning. Here practically nothing was left untampered with long enough to establish a mood. The dissonances which make sense when the music is played in its original form seem unable to vindicate themselves; they remain naughty-boy harmonies. Inasmuch as Revueltas is never strong melodically, relying rather for his power on cumula-

tive emotional impact, it is impossible to present scraps of his music without losing most of the flavor. In *Don Domingo* the barbarous splendor of the orchestration becomes noisy chaos. One notable exception is the dream, which is set to the *Duelo* from *Homenaje a Garcia Lorca*. This *pas de deux* is the most moving passage, because the music is sufficiently repetitious and mood-making. The fact that the ballet at this point abandons its quasi-ethnographical approach in favor of pure fantasy also has something to do with it. The folklore in *Don Domingo* has the quality of a tourist poster. It is a little too exact to be so fake. Practically all the instrumentation is Revueltas'. Dorati reorchestrated *Duelo* and *Baile* from *Homenaje*, and finished *Troka*. The rest of the score is made up of parts of *Janitzio*, *Camino*s and *La Coronela*. The inclusion of a dismemberment of Revueltas' last work, itself a ballet, I consider a shameless procedure. If at some distant time in the future someone wants to compile a posthumous Stravinsky ballet, it might be considered legitimate if parts of the *Symphony for Wind Instruments*, the *Capriccio*, the *Dunbarton Oaks Concerto*, and a magnified version of the *Octet* were strung together to provide a score (although the result would be esthetically worthless.) But if the compiler added one page of *Petrouchka*, his action would be, as far as I am concerned, unethical and lousy. *La Coronela* is a very good ballet in its own right. Why should anyone break it up in order to make an inferior one?