

that pretty soon you begin to expect them to do what you don't expect them to do.

The City Opera Company's other novelty was *Gale* by Ethel Leginska. It started like a high school cantata and ended when Mr. John Charles Thomas threw his impressive bulk upon the resounding surface of a subterranean canvas river.

The season's third operatic novelty was Weinberger's *Schwanda*, creditably mounted by The University of Chicago.

Among the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's good deeds may be mentioned the symphonic pieces from Alban Berg's *Lulu*, Hindemith's symphony, *Matthias the Painter*, Walton's *First Symphony*, upon which a number of the subscribers had the effrontery to walk out, the Stravinsky *Piano Concerto*, twelve years too late, and Malipiero's *Symphony* (In Four Tempi, as the Four Seasons), a quiet piece in the composer's most graceful manner. Other less conclusive works included *Types* by Ferroud (very attenuated), the Handel-Schönberg *Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra* which I thought a mess, and Haubiel's *Rittrati*, a curious and incompetent suite in three confused movements.

Only three local composers were given opportunity to bring distinction to themselves: Robert Sanders with a ballet suite entitled *The Tragic Muse*, Leo Sowerby with a new string quartet and a striking Easter anthem entitled *The Risen Lord*, and David Van Vactor whose composer-concert in January displayed a growing capacity to be articulate and to go beyond the somewhat classical limitations of idiom he has heretofore imposed upon himself.

A few hours away from Chicago the Ann Arbor Festival last May presented Howard Hanson's *Songs from the Drum Taps*, enthusiastic, noisy and sometimes exciting music in which the words are very badly set.

Cecil Michener Smith

GOOD RUSSIAN ADVICE ABOUT MOVIE MUSIC

LAST summer Schumiatski, the head of the entire Soviet cinema production, accompanied by his technical staff, visited Hollywood to study America's methods of picture-mak-

ing. Upon their return to the East they dined with G. W. Pabst and myself on the eve of their departure for Russia. I was much interested in their opinion of our American movie-making. They believe that our pictures are generally poor in content, but that, technically, Hollywood cannot be equaled; that our directors, cameramen, cutters, soundmen, and musicians are technically superb and that the entire cinema process in our studios is, from start to finish, American efficiency at its very best. On the whole I agree with their conclusions. But I have also noticed that despite the marked excellence of Russian films, especially of the scores accompanying them, they are in some respects amateurish and crude. The sound recording is invariably bad, and, to name only one of the more glaring faults, the orchestra and orchestration obviously badly distributed. My brother, who has been spending the last several years in Russia, writes me that the technical equipment of the Russian studios is considerably behind the times. I have no doubt that a little refurbishing and a few good Hollywood soundmen would vastly improve the Russian sound-films.

Therefore, when I opened Leonid Sabaneyeff's book, *Music for the Films* (Pitman Publishing Corporation, London 1935), I expected to be plunged into a highly "artistic" and impractical affair. To my surprise, the contrary proved true. Sabaneyeff, a member of the Russian State Academy of Arts and Sciences, might well, to judge from his book, occupy a high position upon the musical staff of any of our leading Hollywood studios. His book is full of precise and useful information. If one discards a number of particularly Hollywoodian admonitions such as "the mass audience is not musical and wants only bright melody which it can easily assimilate, tunes that it can remember and hum to itself on leaving the show, and a minimum of harmonic accompaniment," or the chapter on the "Orchestration of the Sound Film" which is apparently calculated for an obsolete type of condenser "mike," then the composer interested in motion-picture technic will find it an invaluable little handbook. The whole technic of cinema composing and recording is tersely and practically set forth and the beginner cannot help but catch a very clear picture of the entire and somewhat com-

plicated process involved in the fabrication of a film-score. Particularly good, I think, is Sabaneyeff's plan (outlined upon page 53) for preparing most of the necessary music in advance to avoid writing all the music hurriedly and at the last moment. This allows one composer to write and score the entire music of a film instead of demanding the many still necessary for almost any single Hollywood movie (a method I advocated in *Modern Music** over a year ago.)

In this, and in many other details bearing on the preparation of a wholesome, organic score, the book shows a great advance over Hollywood methods. But wherever Sabaneyeff touches the question of sound-equipment, he is less up-to-date. This need not worry the beginner, however. The book is more than adequate in those essentials which a movie composer must know. It is likewise a mine of information on many important small details. For instance, whenever a background is to be brought closer through "panning," Sabaneyeff advocates a crescendo in the music and vice-versa. Such minutiae, often overlooked in Hollywood, are important in a perfectly turned-out score.

On the other side of the ledger, however, Sabaneyeff is, if anything, a little bit too Hollywood. He is mortally afraid that our tyro will use "discordant music" or "atonality," and his pages are interlarded with terrific cautions against shocking the vast unmusical picture public. Perhaps this is necessary for backwoods Siberia, but I vastly doubt that our Western audiences, constantly exposed as they are to the most "shocking" discords in every piece of jazz pouring out of their radios, would find anything short of a major explosion "shocking," and they might even swallow that, providing the dramatic content of the screen picture warranted it. Hollywood scores, especially those accompanying films of macabre tendency, are already beginning to exhibit an innocuous kind of "atonality" and the quite modern score of *The Informer* was considered, even in Hollywood, to be the best of last year. The musical departments of our large studios are progressing by leaps and bounds, and the time is not far off when legitimate composers will be able to compose film-scores they need not be ashamed to sign.

However, Sabaneyeff, though he goes to extremes, is quite right

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about the general tendency of audiences throughout the world. We no longer produce films for the United States alone. Most of the revenue of each film made here comes from outside the U. S. A. Movie theatres in the remotest parts of India, and the middle of the Sahara will show the films of Hollywood, and it is immediately obvious to every would-be cinema-composer that a great many Least Common Denominators must be either negotiated or intelligently contemplated. Melody should be the mainstay of the sound film. But melody, too, need not be "old" it can be as new as a bright penny. The very faults of the cinema business can be utilized to make a new kind of music, open, brilliant, and astonishingly simple.

The serious composer of today has few outlets for the commercialization of his often vast musical technic. If he wants to earn his own living he certainly cannot do so by writing symphonic or chamber music. Happily each year sees the cinema offering him a more and more respectable creative field, at a salary which will help him materially in the production of other more serious musical works. Here is the first text book (but we hope not the last) upon the subject of movie music, the first step towards such an Elysium, and it is not at all a bad start.

George Antheil

"COMPILING" THE DANCE

IN a sense *Dance*, a short history of classic theatrical dancing, by Lincoln Kirstein (G. P. Putnam) is what it claims to be. It follows the course of general Western history, from Pharaoh to Hurok, like a three hundred page footnote on dancing. It lays no claim to completeness or originality. And in so big a scheme it is a detail if the *Commoedia del Arte* is skimped, or if the part on contemporary German dancing is ill informed. The chief thing is that this is the only book of its kind in English. The facts are conveniently collected and well worth notice. Those to whom the history of the ballet is unfamiliar will find lots of surprises. And one can praise wholeheartedly the many quotations.

It is in the last chapters when Mr. Kirstein ventures more into criticism that the book is unfortunate. Such a devotee of discipline for dancers could be very useful if he applied the same