

practically added a new form to the musical theatre. It is not opera, although it partakes of the "number" form of Mozart. And it is decidedly not revue-form. It owes something to the movies, but it is much more attached to the script. Take the spot where the exasperated Sergeant tries to put Johnny through all the military paces, and winds up saying—"and you won't learn, and so the hell with you!" As he starts (speaking), music insinuates itself into his speech, and his enumeration of the maneuvers gains momentum and dash by becoming rhythmical and percussive—until the final expletive, when the music drops out. This almost elementary, uninhibited use of music, seemingly careless, really profoundly sensitive, predicts something new for the theatre. It runs a risk of being choppy, fragmentary; but Weill makes sure there are whole islands of music, and binding passages of music, and entr'acte sections of music. There is nothing wrong with his sense of topography.

I am by nature against having unseen voices sing the parts of the Goddess of Liberty or of having a song for three cannons. I am aware that the stylization of the piece permits this kind of conceit. But it is perilous charm-devising—also it is too difficult to handle well theatrically. Otherwise I think I consent to all Weill's notions in the work. I am hoping that when *Johnny Johnson* actually meets its public there will no longer be the dubious atmosphere of "experiment" about it; that it will have gathered up its best points into a production of unity and development. Certainly what it has to offer in the way of new musical form is needed in the New York theatre as few things are needed in it; and Weill is respected for that new form.

Marc Blitzstein

ON THE HOLLYWOOD FRONT

By GEORGE ANTHEIL

MUSIC, in the motion picture business, is on the upgrade. It may interest musicians to know that I have been remonstrated with because I did not write quite as discordantly as had been expected. "We engaged you to do 'modernistic' music

—so go ahead and do it.” Out here they still call any kind of new music “modernistic” (whatever *that* may be) but one can no longer doubt that Hollywood is developing a real taste for it. Witness the Werner Janssen score for *The General Dies at Dawn*. I had indeed written a few completely non-cacaphonous pages, reflecting that after all the movie public is made up of 60,000,000 human beings. To my astonishment it was not completely to Paramount’s taste. So, joyfully, I have given them what was wanted. In the long Indian scenes of *The Plainsman* this music is now what one might call “the works.”

Hollywood today is determined to go musical in a big way. We are to have a screen version of the life of Richard Wagner, and one of Chopin as well; the Chopin film is already in production at Columbia— it will be directed by Frank Capra. These are only several of a whole batch of “musical” films.

Within a year’s time, a number of composers will, I have no doubt, come to Hollywood, since motion picture producers have found out that better musical scores pay.* First of all it is cheaper to write an authentic and exciting musical background than it is to build an equally authentic and exciting background set. Janssen’s Chinese music lifted at least \$50,000 off the budget of *The General Dies at Dawn*. When good scores begin to do things like this they talk to Hollywood in its own language—the language of money. Secondly, the great movie publics of the world are gradually becoming accustomed to better fitting scores—scores that are especially calculated for the needs of each picture and not dragged out of the pages of Schubert’s *Unfinished*. Today a good score is as essential to a production as good photography. Attempt for instance to foist a 1929-style score or a 1929-style photography upon the present-day movie public and you will be surprised how immediately they protest. The truth of movie-music is becoming apparent; slowly and with infinite patience music is going forward with our new shadow pictures and their miraculous sound effects.

This is especially true of European picture productions of recent date. The credit titles of contemporary movies feature the names of contemporary musicians with increasing frequency. Shostakovitch, Auric, Milhaud, Honegger, are among the many

*Composers must be forewarned: no one should attempt to come out unless he can write “piano scores” at the rate of fifteen to thirty pages a day. Speed is still one of the main requisites of the picture business.

who are not too proud to try their hand in the service of a so-far rather despised art. Picture music—a new art form—is coming into its own.



On the Paramount lot, musical gossip flies fast and furious. Boris Morros is negotiating with the Soviet Government for the loan of Shostakovitch; Paramount, in return, will trade them several of our best sound technicians—men sorely needed in present-day Russia to judge by the hideous quality of their sound recording. Also, according to latest rumor, Paramount has decided to film the opera *Carmen*; at least it has been placed back upon active production schedule. This will be the first opera ever filmed in the movies, scattered previous efforts notwithstanding. Cecil B. DeMille is also seriously considering the production of the opera *Faust* with a scenario completed last year by G. W. Pabst and myself.

Opera, of course, is not at all a new thing upon the modern screen. Many *Mickey Mouse* films are operas in the purest sense of the word—they are little music-dramas and ballets with superlative eye-accompaniment. Speaking of traditional opera, however, I am rather inclined to believe that the film-opera of the future will not find itself by making condensed versions of the Metropolitan Opera House productions. In the first place present-day movie audiences will hardly tolerate the slow tempi of these ancient operas. Movie publics not only want to hear, they want, principally, to see, to see plenty and see it fast. It is infinitely difficult to squeeze a ten-minute aria into the frame of the motion picture, which can only be seventy minutes long. A typical grand opera has not only one such ten-minute aria or chorus, but a good dozen of them. And this explains why producers have hesitated so long before giving us the motion picture version of a stage form which was once such magnificent entertainment.

The only solution of "opera for the movies" is to write brand new motion-picture-operas calculated and adapted to cinema's new speed. The forthcoming production of *Carmen* should prove the case of old or new opera, once and forever. It has been a long and bitter dispute.

Another point long in question is whether or not moving picture music should follow the picture's action, or attempt its own individual symphonic expression. It must now be plain to everyone that if the music *constantly* follows its picture's action, a spotty and choppy score will be the natural result. But—and so it seems to me—if motion picture music attempts a purely symphonic solution it will find itself in the same hot water as the symphonic music which has so misguidedly appeared in various modern operas of the past. Picture music is more closely allied to the dramatic forms than to the symphonic. By its very nature it must be loose in form and style. It is, quite simply, a kind of modern opera. And operatic music in turn must certainly follow the emotional content of its drama and its accompanying poetry. Unless it does so, it will seem totally beside the point. This is just as true of picture music.

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Stokowski's appearance in *The Big Broadcast of 1937* is significant for one thing. It is extraordinary that audiences lured into a motion picture theatre upon the pretense of seeing and hearing the remarkable hat-cha Martha Ray, will likewise swallow a Bach fugue and love it. But this is because the Bach is presented with a technic of showmanship comprehensible to them. Stokowski is entirely equal to the occasion. And since Stokowski remains—for my money at least—the world's greatest orchestral director, so far as I am concerned he can do as he pleases. We have just heard that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer has signed Stokowski to play the part of Wagner in the production centered about that composer's life. That, indeed, should be something!

George Antheil

WITH THE DANCERS

By EDWIN DENBY

DURING the last six weeks New York has been a pleasant place for a person who likes ballet. I have seen one absolutely first class piece, Nijinski's *Faun*; Bérard's sets for the *Symphonie Fantastique*, the second and third of which are as