

*Johnny* and *J'attends un navire*. Half the charm of the album lies in the frail and pathetic voice of Lotte Lenya. It is the voice of the poor little match-girl, the desperate prostitute. The pathos of

this style, both in music and in singing, is purely European, and its appeal today is for those who remember narrow streets of Paris or Berlin on a rainy night.

## THEATRE and FILMS

By ELLIOTT CARTER

**K**URT Weill's new score for *One Touch of Venus* coming after last year's *Lady in the Dark* reveals his mastery of Broadway technic. Apparently he can turn out one success after another with a sure hand. Weill, who orchestrates and arranges his own work, whose flair for discovering and using the stylistic earmarks of popular music is remarkable, has finally made himself at home in America. Where in pre-Hitler days his music underlined the bold and disillusioned bitterness of economic injustice, now, reflecting his new environment and the New York audiences to which he appeals, his social scene has shrunk to the bedroom and he has become the composer of "sophisticated" scores.

The present one represents quite a piece of research into the phases of American love-life expressed in popular music — the barber-shop ballad, the barroom song dripping with bloody murder, the serious and comic parodies of Cole Porter, an uproarious mock-patriotic *Way Out West in Jersey* in the best college spirit style. Even the orchestration with its numerous piano solos in boogie-woogie and other jazz styles constantly recalls night-club atmosphere. Traces of the mordant composer of *Dreigroschenoper* and *Maha-*

*gonny* occur rarely and only in places where Weill is not trying to make an impression. Compared to his other American shows, the music is neither as ingenious and as striking as *Johnny Johnson* nor as forced as his made-to-order jobs for *The Eternal Road* and the railroad show at the World's Fair. But in the atmosphere of Broadway, where so much music is unconvincing and dead, Weill's workmanlike care and his refined sense of style make up for whatever spontaneity and freshness his music lacks.

Hearing *The Merry Widow*, which is one of a string of revivals that started with *Rosalinda* and goes on to bring back *La Belle Hélène* and a retouched *Carmen Jones*, I had the impression that on Broadway, operatic singing with its implied background of musical training and discipline is the exclusive property of stage kings and queens with their retinues, or else of foreigners, or of misguided Americans. In the true America, plain citizens croon on the legitimate stage, where they are judged in terms of their personality, without the complicated barrier of traditional musical routine which transforms them into curiosities. This operetta, filled with so many elegant tunes, is a charming reminder of the days when royalty was

engaged in making fools of itself and of its subjects, when the noble lie was wearing thin and had to be covered with a generous dose of sentimentality.

The colored version of *Carmen* apparently considerably rescored by Robert Russell Bennett and entirely rewritten by Oscar Hammerstein II, called *Carmen Jones*, is filling the town with advance publicity. I have always loved *Carmen* and don't see any reason for changing it, unless to translate it into good English. This version translates not only the words but the story also into American modern. It will be interesting to see whether the Bizet music will not seem out of place.

#### FILMS

Aaron Copland and Alexandre Tansman have been chosen by Hollywood to write scores for two new films. The results ought to convince our producers that good symphonic composers have something to offer which the usual Hollywood musician does not. Copland's score for the Samuel Goldwyn production of *North Star* is excellent in a technical way that, for instance, Victor Young's music in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is not. Young serves up a rich variety of different kinds of Spanish music in the styles of Albeniz, Granados and others which seem to have no direct relevance to the characteristics of the plot except to emphasize the locale. Copland, on the other hand, comes to grips with actual particulars of plot, character and mood of this specific picture and emphasizes the points which author and director make. He does this by using fragments of Russian folksong submitted to a process of development and arrangement, and besides, also makes them sound very much his own.

*North Star* is about a Russian agricultural community before and after the Nazi invasion. The picture falls into these two parts, but they do not play off against each other with sufficient dramatic meaning. The peaceful first part stresses picturesqueness rather than efficient modern collectivization (as a Soviet film probably would have). The comrades seem to be living in the familiar old Russia of peasant song and dance days in a neat, charming operetta atmosphere. No reference to preparation for war is made and no suspense is built up to prepare the spectator for the catastrophe. In these early sequences Copland has written three delightful songs to words by Ira Gershwin and a big dance scene which catches the Russian warmth and lustiness. This music with its childlike gaiety is often reminiscent of his *Second Hurricane*. The "going to school" and the two quiet sleep scenes are the best of this side of Copland.

Interrupting a song, *No Village Like Mine*, sung by the young people that are the heroes of this picture, Nazi bombs begin to fall, dive-bombers spit fire and death on the town, Nazi troops march in, Russian guerilla bands are formed and the music has the perennially difficult job of being both background for action and for war noise. One of the most successful musical war sequences so far written, because of its plastic use and intensity of style, it employs music sometimes to join one explosion with another and sometimes to modulate from one mood to another, as in the sequence in which Marina and Damian kiss in great quiet before the latter goes on his perilous mission. The most beautiful and dramatic piece is in the background

for the scenes of the women burning their own homes before the Nazis come. At every point the intelligence and the personal elevation of Copland's music is recognizable, even in his arrangement and orchestration of the *Internationale*.

About the same time this picture was released, a Soviet film on a similar theme appeared. *We Will Come Back* has a score drawn mostly from the first movement of Scriabin's *Third Symphony*, *Le Divin Poème*, and from the fascist march in Shostakovich's *Seventh*. After seeing the two pictures one wonders why we dignify our enemies as super-gangsters while the Russians treat them as inhuman fools beneath contempt.

Alexandre Tansman's score for Du-vivier's *Flesh and Fantasy* starts out with a bit of title music surprising for Hollywood. In the vigorous, dissonant and contrapuntal style of his *Triptyque* and indeed of many another modern score, the music takes off in a very arresting way. Also excellent and interesting is the long dance music sequence providing the background for the Mardi-Gras episode. After this, the score becomes more and more routine, except for those eerie moments, when by many a strange effect it points up rather ordinary looking scenes with a Freudian significance, notably those on ship-board. But by and large, screwiness has its limits in Hollywood and love-scenes impose certain hallowed musical patterns which even Tansman could not break through.

Two films about the mores of composers, a new American version of the *Constant Nymph*, with an elaborate score by Eric Korngold, and a British technicolor film, *The Great Mr. Handel*,

give us in considerable detail the artist at grips with his art and his public. The new *Constant Nymph* centers around the vacillations of a composer from the time he gets a musical idea to the time he gets it on paper as a symphonic poem and has it performed. The interest of course, lies in the effect of Charles Boyer's loves upon his musical style. While involved with high English society, his work turns into a trivial piece of "modern music," for here music is treated as a means of conspicuous waste, while among the art-loving Sangers, his music is rewritten to fit in with the conventional standards of lushness. This film makes an interesting assumption about the musical audience, namely, that it consists of perfect listeners who know a good work the minute they hear it.

In the Bohemian Sanger family, Mr. Handel would not have cut much of a figure, sitting continuously at his desk, as he does in the big scene of the British film, working day and night with pen and ink, piling up score paper and occasionally visualizing religious scenes from August 22 to September 14, 1741, while the movie-goer hears the *Messiah* as it is being conceived in the composer's mind. (It took travel from Belgium to Switzerland to England, two love affairs and two corresponding changes of style and a year's work for the five minute symphonic poem of the *Constant Nymph* to be composed). *The Great Mr. Handel* is unfortunately a rather heavy-handed historical reconstruction of that period of his English life when his success as a composer of Italian operas was waning and he had lost favor with the court. It traces his consequent change of style to that of his well-known English oratorios.

. . . impassioned Handel  
 meant for a lawyer and a masculine  
 German domestic  
 career — clandestinely studied  
 the harpsichord  
 and never was known to have  
 fallen in love,

is shown as Marianne Moore here portrays him, honest, extraordinarily industrious, all in all a simple and a very noble man. There has been some quib-

bling over the lack of congruity between the ancient instruments filmed and the London Philharmonic sound that comes out of them. Certainly the job of orchestration itself is more often up to the film standards than to Handelian correctness. This detracts very little however from the genuine sympathy and understanding shown a great composer and his life of work in this film.

## DANCING on BROADWAY

By S. L. M. BARLOW

NOT very long ago I witnessed some excellent ballet in Buenos Aires. Our old friend Col. de Basil was presiding over the season, for which the regular corps de ballet of the Colón had been welded to a stratosphere of itinerant stars. I saw a superb performance of *Scheherazade*, with Shabolevsky and Grigorieva, a so-so *Carnaval*, and the lovely *Concerto of Mozart*, (fifth for violin), with choreography by Balanchine and sets by Tchelitchev. It is an enchanting work and should be given here.

The circumstances of dancing on Broadway are somewhat different, but there's a plenty of the finest to be seen here. We have what is irreverently called the Chase National, also Katherine Dunham, and various smaller exhibits. We are the dancingest people on earth from jitterbugs to Nora Kaye and our dance music has affected the world. It is only proper to begin with the most authentic exposition of Americana: Katherine Dunham's *Tropical Revue*.

Whether the troupe is interpreting a Melanesian ritual of jealous gods and

husbands turned into snakes, or the less scissile aspects of the Haitian rites of puberty, or plain Latin American rumbas, the amount of vitality and incandescence generated is extraordinary. Not a moment is flaccid, pompous, or common. If some of it is naïve, the next second there is something of that immemorial dignity peculiar to Negroes or of the luxuriant shamelessness of a Brazilian liana. Technically, there is sufficient skill, even to the Shan Kar neck-movements, and the acrobats are neat. Above all, there is grace — and heat.

The last third of the program is North American: Strutters' Ball, Memphis Blues, Boogie Woogie, and Barrel House. It's less exceptional, less primitive than the first parts, but equally well done. And even the exotic sections are properly New Yorkese, the melted and assimilated idioms, exposed by New York bodies familiar with jive and jazz, even though the names may be Gomez or Ohardiño. There's nothing like this at the Copacabana in Rio, unless we send it there.