

years old, and scenery and costumes belong more completely than choreography or music to that "abstract" fashion, the didactic heroics of the early twenties (those were Mary Wigman's best days, too).

Of another addition to the repertory, a new version of *Jardin Public* (choreography Massine, music Dukelsky) I personally feel the less said the better. What I saw was an unpleasant confusion. In the mess of movements the "Poet's" bit of classic clarity did not help. Massine had found a few ingenious gestures for the "Workers" and odd ways of posturing for himself, rather reminiscent of Kreutzberg. But I saw no interest, or strength, or even intention to anything. Coming from our first ballet company, I found it thoroughly distasteful.

Edwin Denby

THOMSON SCORES FOR A NEW DEAL FILM

THE *Plow that Broke the Plains*, is a new American documentary movie, produced by the Resettlement Administration, written and directed by Pare Lorenz, photography by Ralph Steiner, Paul Strand, and Leo Hurwitz, music by Virgil Thomson.

The achievement of this movie is that it gave young photographers and a young musician a chance. We have too few movies that do. The intelligence both of our artists and of our audience suffers from lack of employment. The Government is to be congratulated on making this start.

"T. P. t. B. t. P." has a fine subject. Settlement of the Great Plains, intensive agriculture owing to the war boom and the credit boom, then drought, dust storms, misery, and Relief. The director has dramatized it in the form of a documentaire, a good form but an art form. Unfortunately, seen as a work of art, the film is bad.

The trouble is that the weight of the film—the most space, best build, heaviest shots—center around the exploitation of the land that collapsed with the crash of '29. The boom is the big thing pictorially. When the drought comes, the most thrilling pictures are over, the drought has merely the effect of denouement,

of a result. And Relief is tacked on the end like an unnecessary epilog. But judged by the tragedy, drought is the big thing, drought—the five years of it—is the action. From the standpoint of the soil the weight of the drama is in its progressive disintegration, its visible ruin. From the standpoint of the farmers, who are our real concern, the weight of the drama is in the tenacity of their fight against the drought and the dust, in their visible endurance and destitution. These should be the overwhelming pictures. The attempt at relief would form a clear denouement. This misproportion has made the film longwinded and confused. Worse than that it has turned the story into a nostalgic fairytale of boom times, evading the real issue: Fellow citizens in misery, what can we do for them. Unfortunately, the *Plow* is smug.

But faults of cutting have not destroyed the craftsmanship of the photography. The photographers deserve every praise. The beauty of many shots is so great you feel like applauding when you see them. The stills also are superb; it is strange that they give that very sense of heroic disaster that the film has avoided.

Mr. Lorenz who is to be thanked for choosing such gifted photographers is also to be thanked for having chosen one of our most gifted composers to do the music. To listen to interesting music during a movie is an unexpected pleasure. This was Thomson's first movie job, and he did it well. The music is pleasant, with more distinction, cut and clarity than any Hollywood music, and better suited to the microphone, that's a little awkward for heavy sonorities. He has used cowboy and soldier songs to advantage, giving them a quality like an eighteenth century liveliness. The score is perhaps a bit too loud at times, it has divisions more definite than the picture, and the climax is not as good as the rest. But the beginning and the charming fugato are good Thomson and good music. All our young composers ought to get such a chance. And our poets ought to get a chance at the spoken text. In an art film it's a poet's job.

As a Government experiment the picture is impressive enough. I shall certainly go again for the photography and the music.

E. D.