

example of our emerging non-European ballet style. The Players won the prize as the only ballet to give new local choreographies. Though I didn't care for Loring's *Man from Midian*, his *Prairie* had a certain American quietness and a beautiful finale. Christensen's *Jinx* was poetic dancing, but the possibilities seemed lightly sketched rather than completely realized. Another point for this lively organization was the new scores it brought, Wolpe's for *Man from Midian* and Dello Joio's for *Prairie*. The Wolpe struck me as highly respectable rather than anything else, but I enjoyed the Dello Joio, which was not stylish but attractive and modest, with an unobtrusive local flavor. The recent Britten suite used for *Jinx* I thought very uninteresting; however it sounded far better on the piano than any score in the repertory (Colin McPhee's arrangement). And the costumes for *Jinx* by Bockman were the most poetic of any I saw all winter. The Dance Players didn't perhaps have quite enough character, but they brightened up the season considerably.

Looking back over the ballet of the whole year, it is clear that its greatest loss is the absence of the Ballet Caravan organization. The new works it took to South America, were, as a group, far more interesting than any set of novelties offered us this year by the other companies. In and out of the Caravan, its

manager, Lincoln Kirstein, has certainly produced more ballets worth our seeing than anyone else in the same period.

III

It was the Circus that this spring played the trump card of ballet, beating the Operahouse Gang at their own game by putting on a Balanchine-Stravinsky novelty. It was also the world's first elephant ballet, and it was a fine number. The elephants do all their charming old tricks and one new one – the classic adagio pirouette supported by the partner. They are lively and feminine, and the many pretty girls with garlands are very exact and very pleasant. Balanchine as usual has deployed counterrhythm, asymmetry, and adagio invention. And there is none of that drill-sergeant emphasis on uniformity that destroys the real flavor of dances by animals or athletes. The Stravinsky is a bit jumpy, but he's an old friend, we're glad to meet up with him, and even if we can't quite make out what he's saying in the general din, I'm willing to give him the benefit of the doubt. "There goes Igor", as *The New Yorker* reports the band saying.

There was a Chinese wirewalking number with a completely beautiful flower-table, that made me think how sumptuous the Circus would look if the whole decor could be designed and executed by Chinese. The Bel Geddes color is all aniline and it's like playing in one key very loud for three hours.

ON THE FILM FRONT

By LÉON KOCHNITZKY

IN the musical score that accompanies the revival of the *Gold Rush*, now

converted into a sound film, there is not a single line that can not be traced to

some illustrious or obscure musician. But Chaplin's skilled touch is perceptible in every sound effect. This kind of musical bric-à-brac is charming, attractive, witty. It is thrown together in the same way as the clothing of the great artist, and it fits the story with the same ludicrous appropriateness as the bowler hat and the old morning coat fit Chaplin. Not a single piece of it has been made on purpose to match a situation or a landscape. It is untidy, unexpected, absurd. And it is perfect and could not be replaced by anything more suitable or better adapted.

Some of the musical features come directly from those famous Hollywood props, where you can buy tempests, blizzards and summer sunsets by the pound, where sobs, kisses and sighs are sold by the yard. The choice of such elements was most probably dictated by a desire for parody. The introduction, on the other hand, of such an extremely popular opera feature as the *Star Romance* from *Tannhäuser*, reveals the acute psychological sense of the artist. The famous tune, deprived of all its orchestral surroundings, weaves unobtrusively in the background. Just as a banal tune drums in one's head, in the midst of some perplexing problem. The *Star Romance* winding in and out of the Klondike Cabin seems perfectly in its place, and only an unfeeling and hard-hearted spectator would ask why it is there. The world-famed "dance of the rolls" is performed to the tune of an antiquated polka-mazurka. Maybe it was specially written, maybe it is an old ditty. The fact that it cannot be recognized nor identified, banal and commonplace as it is, makes it all the more characteristic. When — at the end of the picture — the

little fellow, now a splendid millionaire, is seen pacing up and down the upper deck of the ship that is bringing him back to the U. S. A., the orchestra plays a grand fantasy on "For he's a jolly good fellow." Nothing could give more keenly the sensation of deliverance, of freedom, of relief from worries than this rhythmic and tonal nonsense. The melody in this place, "helps to make the picture more effective," to use once again Aaron Copland's definition of good film-music.... An amusing feature is the breaking of the icicles under the roof of the penthouse: they jingle like musical bells.

But the real poetic atmosphere of Chaplin's sound-track is created by the absence of dialogue. As an impersonal announcer, Chaplin himself tells the whole story as if it were read from a book. It is in the manner of the Chinese theatre, often used also by Russian producers to stage Pushkin's short-stories and the novels of Dostoievsky. It has also been employed by Paul Claudel in his *Christophe Colomb*. In the world of the cinema, Sacha Guitry has already given it a trial in his *Mémoires d'un Tricheur*.

In the *Gold Rush*, this type of storytelling keeps the action deliciously unreal. The magic world in which dwell the little fellow and his companions would lose a great part of its mysterious charm if it were brought to earth by the inevitable vulgarity of a colloquial dialogue. — "Then the girl said . . ." Instead of the sweet feminine voice, a profound barytone utters the girl's part. This technic is the reverse of that generally used by the radio, where the multiplication of the voices is a current device to materialize and give life to human

speech. If an announcer before the mike says: "The General then declared to the Ambassador . . .," the General's speech is then given by another person whose voice makes a strong contrast. By avoiding the banality of an ordinary dialogue, Charlie Chaplin has staged the whole action in the remote world of dream and poetry.

III

Didactic poetry is considered a boring subject by both teachers and students all over the world. Nevertheless, many a beautiful passage is to be found in the *Georgics*. But this is not the case with *The Land*, a tiresome and didactic film, produced by the Department of Agriculture. Except for its theme, *The Land* has little to do with the Vergilian poem. A more striking analogy could be found between *The Land* and Ovid's *Halieutica*. Poor old Naso, forerunner of all exiled poets, not only wrote desperate epistles to his wife and friends from his refuge on the Black Sea, but also composed a poem on the natural history of fishes. The only fragment we possess of the *Halieutica* consists of an enumeration of over two hundred and thirty names of fishes – if I remember rightly. The difficulty lies in identifying each Latin name with the actual species or variety of sea-food it is supposed to represent. Hence a quiz dear to the hearts of scholars from Jena and Tübingen.

The Land, recently presented at the Museum of Modern Art, puzzles the spectator in the same way. It is a mosaic of American landscapes, very beautiful and very impressive, some of them showing the rich fertility of the American soil – cotton plantations, corn fields, orchards, orange groves, – others, the awesome consequences of erosion and

floods.

It is as typically didactic as the *Georgics* but despite the skill of the cameraman, it does not contain such gems as the description of the bees or the *O Fortunatos nimum* . . . A lack of continuity characterizes the whole production and makes it appear loose and disconnected – as fragmentary as Naso's collection of fishes.

The score by Richard Arnell is agreeable and interesting. It shames the dullness of the film by its flowing musical invention. The *Pastoral* of the first sequence is a well balanced piece with a light, clear and bright orchestration. Some old contrapuntal tricks, like that of the "enlarged" theme, are used with great skill. The *Adagio* of the Maryland tobacco plantation, enveloped in a dreamy atmosphere, evokes the anticipatory pleasure of the smoker. A certain tendency to break out in rhapsody is always dominated by the musician's self-control.

The *mixing* is also very good: the music and words never fight each other. It is a pity that such a marvelous subject, treated by such gifted artists, should result in such poor stuff.

III

The Korda production of Kipling's *Jungle Book* is a curious mixture of sumptuousness and vulgar handling of this famous masterpiece. The score by Miklosz Rosza is perfectly adequate to the general atmosphere of the production. Although very elaborate and complicated in its instrumental technic, although filled with appetizers, and relishes such as humming choirs, celesta, xylophones and all imaginable percussive instruments, although dipped into a stream of fake orientalism, the whole score remains

dull and boring. There was no necessity of organizing such a waste of musical craftsmanship to achieve this mediocre paraphrase of Grieg's *Peer Gynt* and Selenik's *Marche Indienne*.

III

It would be ungracious of me to speak lightly of such an important film as *Native Land*, directed by Paul Strand and Leo Hurwitz, and in particular of the very moving score Marc Blitzstein has written for it. Its purity of intention – and I attach great importance to that quality in an artist – is always apparent. Vehement and deeply touching, *Native Land* propounds and defends a social theme which need not be judged here. But the faith that animates any artistic creation should receive respect and even admiration. I have been told that the makers of this film worked in close collaboration for years, under very difficult circumstances, before deciding to show their production. Nevertheless, as André Gide has said, good sentiments make bad books. Of course, from the purely artistic or technical point of view, *Native Land* is not a bad film. It has extremely impressive pictures of workmen and machinery and studies of industrial life. The details are always both striking and beautiful, yet its effect, as a whole is generally awkward and incoherent. The sequence of the manhunt in the Southern woods, though somewhat reminiscent of the pursuit in *Emperor Jones*, is, however, a model for the film transmission of physical suspense and agitation. But just as for certain primitives, such as Margaritone D'Arezzo, or the thirteenth Century Italian mystical poets, one

must have faith completely to appreciate *Native Land*. Otherwise, the sentimental excesses, naïve touches, errors of perspective and taste stand out only too uncomfortably.

Blitzstein's dramatic instinct and abundant talent never fail an instant throughout this film. He has composed a magnificent work which merits painstaking analysis and deep study – more than one viewing makes possible. I was struck by the originality of his musical thought, which, without resorting to modern rhetoric, achieves poignant and grandiose effects. His inspiration, rich and sparkling, seems almost to spring from his feeling for metier, in this instance the metier of special film music. Some of his treatments in this field are unforgettable: the sound of trumpets in the distance, as though they were lost in fog; vocalized choirs; the use of cymbals to make the rhythm of a train an obsession; the voice of a girl singing a tango; a song harmonized for four voices, accompanied by a guitar and the punctuating smacks of ping-pong balls. . .

The entire sequence called "An American Day" is brilliantly handled. Nothing could give a clearer pictorial idea of what happens when a great nation wakes to a day of work. The scenes and melodies of this sequence are equally stirring and lovely. I should like at some time to develop at length the reasons why the musical originality of Blitzstein seems to me so impressive. And I should like to say something too, about the haunting, sonorous voice of Paul Robeson who is the narrator of the film.