

his subject matter. The result is convincing and true, and genuinely national in feeling.

Since the recent music festival in Leningrad, glowing reports have reached us of the colossal success of Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mzensk*. At that time Sergei Radamsky wrote to THE NEW MASSES: "It is acknowledged by the most conservative (in Russia) to be the best opera written in Russia since . . . Moussorgsky's *Boris*. But whatever history will decide, the fact remains that this is the first modern opera that has gained the admiration of musicians and caught the fancy of the general public."

The libretto of the opera is founded upon Leskov's *Lady Macbeth of Mzensk*, but Leskov's religious, conservative attitude towards the heroine, Ekaterina, is altered by Shostakovich to change the portrayal of her character from that of a wicked murderess, who will be punished by God, to one who is the unfortunate victim of her surroundings; brow-beaten by her rich and impotent husband as well as by her father-in-law; and driven to despondency by her idle life and dreary surroundings.

However, the great vitality which Shostakovich has shown in his other works such as the symphonies, piano sonata, etc., was manifest on the present occasion to an even greater degree. Especially in the *Largo*, written in the form of a *passacaglia*, was this true. And this music is written by one trained in Soviet Russia, living and working there, and who (according to no less an authority than Mr. Lawrence Gilman) "has expressed the conviction that the highest purpose of musical art is to serve as a vehicle of social propaganda." The complete opera is to have its American premiere in Cleveland, Jan. 31, 1935, and in New York at the Metropolitan, Feb. 5, 1935.

Mr. Rodzinski's notable program closed with a brilliant performance of the *Petrouchka* by Stravinsky.

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Quintanilla's Etchings

HERE are some of the finest drawings any etcher has ever scratched onto metal. They are the work of a Spaniard, Luis Quintanilla,¹ now in jail and facing a court-martial for participation in the revolt of the Spanish workers against the Lerroux Fascist dictatorship.

Quintanilla's art may be described by analogy with that of a photographer with a fine fast lens who goes about portraying what he comes across.² Here a group of street performers amusing a crowd; or a "big shot" getting his shoes shined as he exudes smug satisfaction with his world; a youth making love to a girl on a park bench; a worker's family at home; the interior of a train in the center of which is a fat, corrupt-looking priest; a cheap brothel behind a cafe; a young woman playing solitaire; the audience in a theatre; etc., etc.

These plates raise some interesting problems for the artist who is sympathetic to revolution and trying to formulate a set of values which will give his work definite direction and integrate it with the rest of his thinking. Quintanilla's art may be characterized as "class-conscious" art. His deeply sympathetic portrayal of the Spanish worker sitting at a table or at home with his family, his ridicule of the Church or his satirical depiction of the "big-business man," leave no doubt as to the class position of this artist. His sympathies are unmistakably with the working-class. But Quintanilla is not a revolutionary artist, as some have claimed for him. He is an *artist-revolutionary*. There is a difference, a very important difference. The revolutionary artist makes his *art* a class weapon, whereas Quintanilla is a revolutionary who *happens to be an artist*, whose art does not reflect his feelings and reactions to the world in which he is living, whose art has little or no relation to his social and political ideas. With the exception of a few mildly satirical comments of a class nature, (perhaps three or four) these plates are essentially decorative. They are hardly up to what we would like to see from an experienced revolutionary. Let us consider in this connection the work of Daumier, or of Grosz. These artists also looked at the world about them . . . and their drawings were so searing in their acidity as to be considered dangerous to the ruling class. They were jailed for their art. Quintanilla is in jail for his political activities. He is a revolutionary in his politics but not in his art. I am not attempting here to advocate one form of activity as preferable to the other. Both are necessary. The question of how an artist may best serve the revolutionary movement—with his art, or by political activity, or

¹ Pierre Matisse Gallery, Fuller Bldg., 57th and Madison.

² Technically his art is quite removed from the technique of photography. He uses creative distortion frankly and masterfully.

various combinations of the two—is determined in practice, by the artist and by the comrades who evaluate his usefulness in the light of the needs of the revolutionary movement at any given time. But for clarity of understanding, in an evaluation of art work, it is necessary to make the above distinctions.

We believe that an art which raises the revolutionary consciousness of the masses, which gives fine plastic and graphic expression to the class struggle—in short, "good revolutionary art"—is the most useful kind of art for our purposes, hence for us the "highest" form of art. The statement of this truth may seem so obvious to the experienced revolutionary artist as to appear redundant, but a great many artists just approaching the revolutionary movement are still very confused on such basic issues. Some of them will, I am sure, feel that such an evaluation of Quintanilla's work is too severe or narrow a judgment (and some of our bourgeois aesthetes would probably consider it the wild ravings of "propagandists") but that is largely due to the carry-over of bourgeois prejudices and conceptions about the "nature of art," which for them means the reduction of all art to purely technical display and sterility of content.

By the way, don't let that little piece in the catalogue by Senor Hemingway prejudice you against Quintanilla. The Big Toreador and Bull-Thrower cannot write fifty consecutive words without sneering at or viciously attacking artists and writers who express their revolutionary feelings and beliefs in their art and literature. You shouldn't hold it against Quintanilla. He is a fine artist.

STEPHEN ALEXANDER.

"On The Waterfront"

During the regular showing of Eisenstein's *Ten Days and The Old and the New* at the New School last Saturday night the Film and Photo League gave us a pleasant surprise: the screening of their new short film, *On the Waterfront*, by Leo Seltzer and Ed. Kern. It is a fine little film giving a stirring picture of the longshoremen and the Marine Workers' Industrial Union.

Seltzer and Kern use the documentary me-

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dium, not the documentary of Robert Flaherty, but rather of Vertov: "depicting modern economic relationships, rendering audiences conscious of their interests, of their economic claims, aware of their remedy."* All the material is actual; there are no acted or staged sequences. Here Seltzer has recorded the dreary waterfront; the despair of men begging for backbreaking jobs at low pay; the joy of the favored few who are given work; the dangerous jobs; the walk-out; work of the Marine Workers' Industrial Union.

The film does not shout slogans. It just lets the pictures tell the story and suggest the way out. The point is clear enough for anybody to get. There are a couple of scenes of stirring film reporting; and there are sequences where intelligent cutting (the agitation by the M. W. I. U.) creates a sequence that is highly dramatic.

One of the chief points contributing to the success of this little film was the fact that the producers limited their theme to one of extremely simple construction. They seemed to have realized, for the first time, that the documentary is perhaps the most difficult medium of expression in film. It's a long and difficult school. When it is mastered we get a *Three Songs About Lenin*. And thus *On the Waterfront* is certainly a step forward.

PETER ELLIS.

* *Evasive Documentary*, by David Schrire, in *Cinema Quarterly*, Autumn, 1934.

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L'Aiglon by Edmond Rostand. Freely adapted by Clemence Dane. Broadhurst Theatre. Romantic interpretation of history in which Napoleon's little eagle gets fits of nasty temper and doesn't get back to France after all. Miss Le Gallienne is the only contribution of the evening by virtue of the best acting of her career.

The Children's Hour by Lillian Hellman. Maxine Elliott Theatre. The lives of two commonplace school teachers blasted by a malicious rumor of Lesbianism. What might have been a finely conceived tragedy turns out to be a horror story in that the very basic motivation of the play results from the pathological lying of an abnormal twelve-year-old child. What follows seems out of context, unconvincing, badly executed. The play, however, is morbid enough to attract a vast audience and has sufficient surface qualities to impress those who are prone to mistake an unhappy ending for a play of great worth. Katherine Emery and Ann Revere do extremely well with trying parts.

Stevodore by Paul Peters and George Sklar. New Yorkers can still see this play—the most important show of the year—at the West End Theatre (125th Street), where it runs until December 8. Two days later it opens in Philadelphia (Garrick Theatre) for a two-week run. Thence to the Selwyn in Chicago. Your attendance required, of course.

Tobacco Road. Forrest Theatre. Second only to *Stevodore*; one of the most rewarding plays in years. Startling insights into the lives of poor white Georgia farmers, and magnificent acting by James Barton. Cheapest seat 50 cents.

Recruits. Artef Theatre (247 W. 48 St.). Exquisitely beautiful in conception, execution and ideological clarity, this Yiddish play presents a penetrating analysis of social forces in the Ghetto during the period 1800-1850.

Sailors of Cattaro by Friederich Wolf. Civic Repertory. Dec. 8. Preview opening of the Theatre Union's next play in a benefit performance for New Theatre. (Advance sale at 114 W. 14 St., cheapest seat 30 cents.)

Juno and the Paycock by Sean O'Casey. Golden Theatre. A picture of Irish workingclass life brutally misleading in its selection of workingclass "types." Heartily applauded by Abbey Theatre enthusiasts and heartily denounced by THE NEW MASSES.

Ladies' Money, Ethel Barrymore. A self-confessed thriller that jams so much hokum into three acts that you laugh when your blood is supposed to be curdling.

Farmer Takes A Wife. 46th Street Theatre. Nostalgia for the good ol' days when it was even money whether the Erie Canal would pay higher dividends than the N. Y. Central. An ultra-cute love story swamps the allegedly central theme: the inevitability of industrial progress in the 1850's and what it did to the homey, agrarian society of those days.

Judgment Day by Elmer Rice. Muddled attack on fascist dictatorships written around the Reichstag Fire frame-up. For three months it has been doing things to the complacency of liberals and Broadwayites in general, but its confusion will probably annoy NEW MASSES readers—or should.

Dark Victory. Plymouth Theatre. Tallulah Bankhead is really a very good actress. Unfortunately she has to struggle against a play which tells a Camille-like love story of an upperclass mädchen with six months to live. Earle Larimore is a good actor too. Both of them work hard together to make mere talkiness exciting and a hackneyed trick entertaining.

S. B.

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