

# SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

*"It Can't Happen Here" dramatized—A Soviet color film—Bach, Brahms, and some others*

AS there came to a close the election campaign the chief issue of which, the Communists said, was the issue of democracy versus fascism, there opened simultaneously in twenty-one playhouses and several languages an avowedly anti-fascist play by an American author of top-flight international reputation. The fact that it was produced by the federal W.P.A. theater, after Hollywood suppressed it and Broadway would have none of it, gave a new meaning to the "defeat Landon" slogan, because the Landon campaign propagandists, as exemplified by the *Saturday Evening Post*, have viciously attacked the federal theater project as subversive boondoggling. Under a Landon administration, this anti-fascist play, at the best, would have been lucky if it got a showing by one labor or experimental theater.

What I am getting at is this: the mere fact that such a play as *It Can't Happen Here* is produced on such a scale under such auspices in such a historical setting should be regarded as an important victory for the friends of freedom and progress, a victory which they should hail and celebrate.

What of the play as anti-fascist propaganda and as entertainment? On both scores it is deserving of praise and blame. The foolish and unjust touch of Red-baiting which marred the novel is absent. While the name fascist is not applied, the nature and direction of the dictatorship is indicated with fair clarity by the fact that the Corps are supported by the steel trust and attack trade unions and burn books. And their tricks of demagoguery should be a fair inoculation for the innocent. At the same time, the fascist dictator is too incredible a caricature, and the motivation of the movement is presented too much in the light of his psychopathic lust for power rather than as the last desperate effort of a decaying capitalism to organize and perpetuate its putrescence. And there is no concrete political solution suggested which the audience, leaving the theater, can begin to put into practice.

These very shortcomings, paradoxically, rather contribute to the interest a politically sophisticated audience will find in the play, in the same way that the vicissitudes of a political campaign or a strike are of absorbing interest to those involved. And the close-up of the effect of the reactionary wave on the small New England town of Fort Beulah carries over into the play the tenseness and vividness of the book. You will find Jessup somewhat less vital behind the footlights, and other characters somewhat altered for better or worse. But, taken as a whole, the dramatization which John C. Moffit and Mr. Lewis have worked out contains enough truth and vitality to make it a significant step forward in the American theater.

A. W. T.

## THE SCREEN

THE Soviet cinema found its voice with *Road to Life*, released by Amkino in 1932. And now Nikolai Ekk, that film's director, gives us the first Soviet feature in color, *Nightingale*, now showing at the New York Cameo. Whatever else may be said for or against its color and the director's use of color or its general effect on the development of the color film, *Nightingale* is a stirring and exciting melodrama of the horrible period of reaction and terror in Russia of 1910-12. It was during this period that the owner of the famous Kuznetzova chinaware plant burned his wooden factory one Christmas night so that he might build a nice new brick plant with the insurance money. That dozens of women and children were cremated alive didn't matter. Some time later the women discovered that the fire was deliberate and that their mothers and sisters were murdered. Thousands of them revolted against the management and later fought soldiers and their guns with plates, vases, and soup tureens. That is history and that is the film. It is the final third which dramatizes the revolt and the battle in one of the most exciting melodramatic episodes ever filmed.

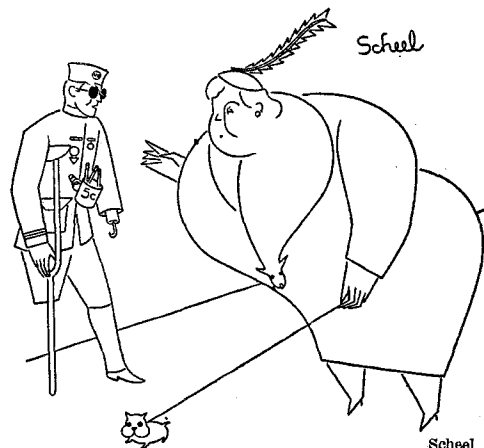
Ekk's contribution to the revolutionary cinema is more technical than dramatic. Working under the handicap of a primitive two-color process rather than the so-called perfect three-color Technicolor process, Ekk has given us a film which not only is as good, but is superior to any color film produced in Hollywood. True, sometimes the register is not very precise. But Ekk has at least made an attempt to use color dramatically. *Becky Sharp* was produced with that in mind, but there was nothing especially dramatic about it. Many of the *Nightingale* sequences are very successful in their use of color for dramatic purposes. Outstanding is the one in which the factory girls read the leaflet accusing the owner of murder and incendiarism. The final

sequence against the red brick factory and the thousands of women in their colored costumes throwing thousands of white dishes doesn't lose anything, certainly, for being in color. Whether or not *Nightingale* would have been a better film in black and white or even just as good is certainly debatable. Indeed, the whole idea of color in cinema is still debatable. The main drawback to prolific experimentation with color is the enormous cost involved—at least four times that of black and white. Ekk not only directed *Nightingale*, but he wrote the scenario and also plays a leading role. The acting of the rest of the cast, mostly women, is on the usual high Soviet level.

*The Legion of Terror*, Columbia Pictures' quickie on the Black Legion, is everything but a real exposé of the activities of that notorious organization. It avoids any positive attack and muffs the greatest dramatic opportunity in years. The story, of course, gets personal about the "Hooded Legion" and its personal revenge on a young steel worker who "talks too much." What this young worker says that should make the Legion sore is left a mystery. All of the characters are mechanical and melodramatic in the usual sense. One can be grateful, I suppose, that the producers didn't make the Legion out to be a radical outfit. You will be amazed to learn that the Post Office Investigators (the new G-men) are doing their best to rid this country of the Legion.

*A Woman Rebels* (R.K.O.-Radio) is the usual nostalgic Hepburn film about a "modernist" in a Victorian setting, and *In His Steps*, the first offering of the newly formed Grand National company, is ordinary sentimental, moralistic, homespun drama. *Ladies in Love* (20th Century-Fox), with Janet Gaynor, Loretta Young, Constance Bennett, and Simone Simon is a complete waste of time. The latest issue of *The March of Time* contains a sequence on the C.I.O.—A.F. of L. fight which muddles the issues somewhat but the effect of which, on the whole, is favorable to the C.I.O. There is also an interesting section on the tithe war between the Anglican church and the English farmers.

At New York's Cinema de Paris is the original French version of *Les Misérables*, which was bought up by United Artists to prevent competition with their American film. They certainly knew what they were about when they prevented the simultaneous release of the two versions, for this original not only has greater fidelity to the novel but is superior in every way. Director Jacques Raymond may not shake the world with his creative ingenuity, but he has produced a fine, moving, and above all honest film. When I first viewed this *Les Misérables*, it ran for three solid hours. The management has wisely



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removed a great deal of the boring and extraneous material, but even so it runs well over two hours. Harry Baur as Valjean and as the peasant who is mistaken for Valjean, does a beautiful and sensitive bit of acting. You might argue that Charles Laughton's conception of Jarvet, the police-inspector menace of the story, is sounder than the interpretation given it by the French actor. I won't argue that point.

PETER ELLIS.

## MUSIC

NOVEMBER will be an expensive month for record buyers, for there is almost a superfluity of valuable discs headed by the Schweitzer album of Bach organ preludes and fugues, the Budapest Quartet version of the Bartok string quartet in A minor, the Brahms waltzes and intermezzi played by Bachaus, and such minor items as Koussevitzky's new "Unfinished" of Schubert, the Brahms C-major trio by Hess, D'Aranyi, and Cassado, and a delightful Tansman *Suite Divertissement*.

Undoubtedly the most impressive of the releases is the American pressing of the Schweitzer Bach (Columbia album 270). In honor of the occasion Columbia has upped the price of the records and included a lucid exposition of the themes by Harvey Grace, the British critic—something which should serve as a model for other companies. The recording of the organ is exemplary, the playing only slightly pedantic, and the music overwhelming: the fantasia and fugue in G minor, prelude and fugue in F minor, toccata and fugue in D minor, the preludes and fugues in C and G major, and the "Little" fugue in G minor. Albert Schweitzer is perhaps the greatest living authority on Bach, which makes the purchase of this volume a necessity to anyone who still believes that the Stokowski arrangements have any relation to the original.

Tucked away in this month's lists is a bit of fluff: Tansman's *Suite Divertissement* for piano, violin, viola, 'cello, played by a Belgian group headed by the pianist Marcel Maas. The music itself is inconsequential, but the treatment could hardly be excelled. The less pretentious dance movements are naturally the most successful, and the players have just the right vitality. Tansman, incidentally, is one of the few composers who have been able to adapt themselves to the task of writing incidental music for the movies. Certainly this is more amusing than most of what has come out of Hollywood (Columbia album X-66).

The Brahms C-major trio is certainly not great music, but the playing of Myra Hess, Yelley D'Aranyi, and Gaspar Cassado makes it at least warm and ingratiating. There are not many virtues in Miss D'Aranyi's scratchy violin playing, but she is a good ensemble artist, able to conceal her tonal deficiencies before the microphone. Miss Hess, though slightly affected in the first movement, displays her usual round Matthey tone, and

Cassado is an extremely competent 'cellist (Columbia album 266).

I have not yet had a chance to study the new recordings of Verdi's great opera, *Falstaff*, made by the orchestra, chorus, and principals of Milan's La Scala. Temporarily, it is sufficient to say that the work is adequately recorded and occasionally well sung. There is, however, considerable surface noise on the disks (Columbia operatic album 16). The new Meyrowitz version of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* is not appreciably better than the old one of Weingartner. Recorded a few years ago by Pathé, this album won a French "grand prize," but France's recording standards are lamentably low (Columbia album 267).

The Budapest Quartet's interpretation of the Bartok A-minor quartet is in every way a masterpiece (Columbia, M-320). There is probably no chamber music organization that combines the qualities of integrity, rhythmic vitality, and tonal opulence to such a degree as does this foursome. The music is considerably less taxing to the untrained ear than much of Bartok's later work, and there are many moments of great power and beauty.

Instead of giving us the magnificent and practically unrecorded fifth symphony of Schubert (B-flat major), Koussevitzky sees fit to inflict still another version of the B-minor "Unfinished." The recording, echo and all, is superb, and the Boston Symphony has never been in better form on records. The excerpt from the ballet music of *Rosamunde* which makes up the last side is unexpectedly sluggish and heavy (Victor M-321).

Another excellent album from Victor is the collection of piano waltzes (opus 39) and intermezzi of Brahms, played by Wilhelm Bachaus. Perhaps the waltzes are a bit ponderous, but most of the playing is close to technical perfection, and the recording very good.

Decidedly not recommended are the two records of the Bach second Brandenburg concerto, sloppily played by a poor French orchestra under Cortot. The F trumpet is out of tune and forced, the conducting idiosyncrasies of M. Cortot hard to bear, and the records inferior both to the fine Columbia disks, supervised by Adolph Busch, and the adequate Brunswick-Polydors, conducted by Alois Melichar (Victor 11930-1). Thoroughly unexciting is Albert Spalding's interpretation of the hackneyed Tartini "Devil's Trill" sonata (Victor 14139).

HENRY JOHNSON.



## The Radio

(Times given are Eastern Standard, but all programs listed are on coast-to-coast hookups. Readers are asked to report at once any anti-working-class bias expressed by these artists or their sponsors.)

### FORTHCOMING BROADCASTS

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