

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

A British film of the Russian revolution—Unions and phonograph records—Picasso's influence

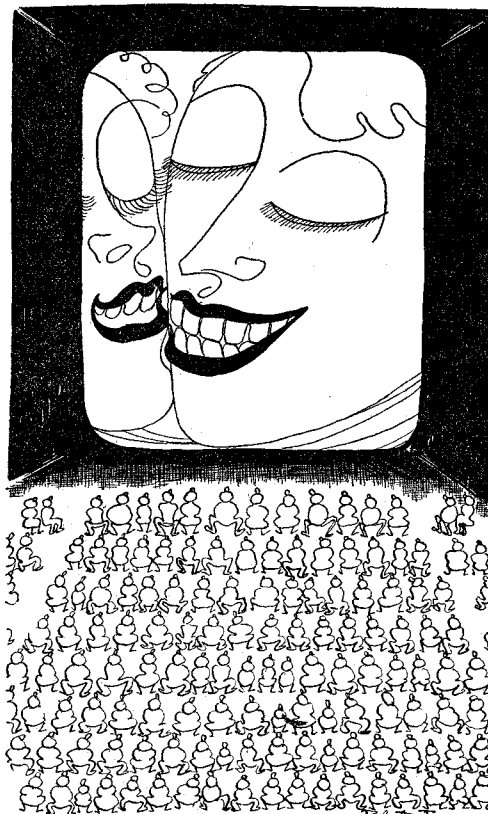
IN spite of the fact that Jacques Feyder who is known to American audiences for his *Kermesse Héroïque* (*Carnival in Flanders*) directed *Knight Without Armor* (London Films—United Artists), I was afraid that the dramatization of James Hilton's romantic novel of the Russian revolution might tend to be another anti-Soviet motion picture. It is, however, as liberal and honest as it is commercially possible to be about the Soviet Union and the Russian revolution. By that I do not mean that it is a *true* picture of the Russian revolutionary movement or of the civil war. One could hardly expect that. But outside of the plot, the film does try very hard to establish authenticity of locale and types. Except in one or two cases, the revolutionists and the peasants are not ridiculed. On the other hand, with the exception of Marlene Dietrich who is, after all, the star, the Whites are not glorified. In the true spirit of liberalism, Feyder tries to show acts of cruelty and terror on both sides. If anything, this so-called objectivity gives a slightly higher score to the Reds.

In any event the film is essentially a series of episodes in which Donat, an Englishman who finds himself with the Red partisans, tries to get Marlene Dietrich out of the country so that they can live happily ever after in England. Thus, they are alternately captured by the Whites and Reds.

The first half of the film is exciting. The sequence in Siberia is especially satisfying from the point of view of drama as well as of exposition. The sequence in which the Reds recapture a town lost to the Whites is stirring. But after we have had three or four dramatic climaxes in addition to an idyllic love sequence between Donat and Dietrich, the film becomes a bore. There is no reason for its having ended where it did, since it might have stopped earlier or gone on indefinitely. The two stars do manage to escape, however, through the kindness and courtesy of the American Red Cross.

In spite of its dull plot, the film is exceptionally interesting from a formal point of view. The sets by Lazare Meerson, who worked for René Clair and *Carnival in Flanders*, are simple and brilliantly executed. Feyder has managed to make the photography more than good. And there are several sequences that are examples of brilliant imagination, especially the scene with the insane station master. The supporting cast is first rate.

King Solomon's Mines (Gaumont British): Another one of Rider Haggard's adventure tales come to the screen. It is far better entertainment than the R.K.O. version of *She*. Robert Stevenson has managed to give us several imaginative episodes in this story of a treasure hunt in northern Africa. Paul Rob-



Robert Joyce

son's wonderful voice and singing is outstanding even though the lyrics are meaningless. Cedric Hardwicke and Roland Young also contribute entertainment value to the film.

The Emperor's Candlesticks (M.G.M.): History in its most romantic and unsatisfactory manner. The story of how a group of Polish nationalists of the last century kidnaped the Czar's son in order to force the Russian executioner to release one of their countrymen. William Powell is the debonair Polish agent who must get the ransom note to the Czar and Luise Rainer the Russian agent who is supposed to turn Powell over to the Russian secret police. Needless to say, their paths cross, and there is romance. There is also a nasty head of the Russian secret police who has it in for Miss Rainer because she was outwitted by Mr. Powell. But the Czar is very noble; he recognizes true love and he succeeds in playing Cupid. A complete waste of such a brilliant actress as Miss Rainer.

PETER ELLIS.

PHONOGRAPH MUSIC

SIX weeks ago the NEW MASSES [issue of May 28] carried an article criticizing certain labor conditions at the Bridgeport plant of the American Record Company, makers of Columbia, Brunswick, Vocalion, Perfect-Melotone, Master, and Variety records. At that time there was no

union organization whatsoever in the factory, and wages were far from high.

What has happened since then reads like a fairy tale. The United Electrical and Radio Workers' Union, a C.I.O. affiliate, went to work and succeeded in organizing more than 90 percent of the workers. The management, upon the enlightened advice of its president, Richard Altschuler, called a meeting of the workers at which it informed them that they were free to join any union they pleased, and that the company would recognize as sole bargaining agent whatever union was endorsed by a majority of the employees. Last week Mr. Altschuler signed a closed-shop agreement with the U.E.R.W., granting a 12½ percent wage increase, a five-day forty-hour week with pay for overtime, seniority rights and complete grievance machinery, with the further stipulation that all employees must become members of the union within thirty days after employment. This contract is a milestone in the history of the phonograph industry; it is the first closed shop agreement that the powerful U.E.R.W. has been able to secure in the state of Connecticut.

The American Record Company manufactures approximately 40 percent of the records on the American market. Its labor policy is now far more advanced than that of any other phonograph company. The Decca plant in New York is still completely unorganized, and the R.C.A. Victor Company is busily engaged in fighting a National Labor Relations Board election in which an overwhelming majority of the workers chose the U.E.R.W. rather than the company union. Readers should bear this fact in mind.

DURING the last few years Jascha Heifetz has surged forward in the musical world. His concert programs, which once were overloaded with Vieuxtemps, Wieniawski, and other technical trash, have become models of taste and insight. He is now always on the lookout for new music and unhackneyed works of established composers. Rudolph Polk, who became associated with Heifetz two years ago, is said to have had much to do with his artistic awakening, but the main credit belongs to Heifetz.

Four years ago it would never have occurred to Heifetz to record such uncommercial items as the two Mozart sonatas for violin and piano in B-flat major (Koechel Nos. 378 and 454), which Victor has just released on Masterworks Set 343. Although he is far from an ideal interpreter of Mozart, Heifetz plays these two delightful sonatas with faultless technique, a tone which only occasionally acquires an excess of schmaltz, superb rhythm, and commendable restraint. Emanuel Bay is an excellent partner at the piano, although he is perhaps lacking in grace.

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Bruno Walter version of the most wonderful of Brahms's symphonies, the third, in F-major (M-341). The tone of the Vienna Philharmonic is superlative, the recording more than adequate; the only thing lacking is some of the rhythmic fire to be found in the version by Clemens Krauss, which is not available in this country.

Topping the Columbia July supplement is a domestic recording of one of the last great Mozart quartets, No. 25 in F-major (Set 296). The Stradivarius String Quartet, which includes Pochon and D'Archambeau of the late Flonzaley, as well as Wolfe Wolfinson, first violin, and Marcel Dick, viola, gives an extremely competent performance. The recording seems to be far superior to that of the Roth Quartet, and the album is in every way a wise investment.

Yella Pessl climaxes her extremely active recording career with an album of fourteen Scarlatti sonatas for harpsichord (Columbia Set 298). I, for one, am sick of seeing the patronizing notices Miss Pessl has been receiving from record critics, for her playing here is of the highest order. Her technique is practically impeccable, and her crispness of style makes these slight works appear like gems. Hardly any of these sonatas have been previously recorded.

JOHN HAMMOND.

THE FINE ARTS

PICASSO'S message to the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy espousing the loyalist cause in Spain should awaken a new interest in his art in the United States. His words are a challenge to all artists today who are struggling for the right to live and create.

"My whole life as an artist has been nothing more than a continuous struggle against Reaction and the death of art. How could anybody think for a moment that I could be in agreement with Reaction and death, against the people, against freedom?"

In these moving words, Picasso has written the best criticism of his own art. Like the sensitive seismograph, which records a catastrophe in nature, Picasso, the artist, registers the social earthquake of fascism and recoils from its violence. More than anyone, he perceives that a system bolstered by war and violence can have no place for the creative artist, even for those artists who conservatively uphold the ideals of bourgeois society. For in practice fascism opposes the very ideals which the bourgeoisie formulated when it was a progressive class. The creative artist, whose business it is to deal with forms and images and emotions, is bound to call attention to this terrific contradiction, which the fascists strive so hard to conceal in order to mask the naked dictatorship of monopoly capitalism.

No one who has ever stood in the room in the Museum of Western Art in Moscow, which is lined to the ceiling with Picasso's paintings, could help but feel that he was in the presence of one of the great tragic artists



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