

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

Synthetic coronation movies—The question of music for the masses—New art shows

WITH their *Prince and the Pauper*, Warner Bros. demonstrate their astute sense of what is called showmanship. Although it has a superficial relationship to Mark Twain's satirical novel, this film is essentially about the coronation. This should be very distressing to the British film industry and the newsreels, which have made elaborate plans and have gone to great expense to "shoot" the ritual. And no doubt this should make England's most nationally minded film critic, Caroline Lejune (of the *London Observer*) weep once more, as she did at *Cavalcade*, that Hollywood makes better British films than the home boys.

This film is the story about a mistaken identity. The pauper manages to take the place of the young prince (Henry the Eighth's son), and there are adventures and court intrigue. Errol Flynn does some hard riding against a projected background and some fancy fencing. But the big thing about the film is the coronation sequence. And believe me, the brothers Warner put everything they had into the sequence. It is actually a preview of the coming coronation. If you had any doubts about T. A. Jackson's assertion in last week's *NEW MASSES* that "to a large extent the U.S.A. is to blame for the forthcoming coronation ballyhoo," this film can convince you.

Internes Can't Take Money (Paramount): A muggy saccharine film about hospital life, internes, gangsters, and a lost child. The writers have taken a cue from *The Eternal Mask* and some situations from *Men in White*, and filled in with most of the other hospital-film clichés. Barbara Stanwyck, as usual, hasn't much to offer in the way of acting, but oh how she can turn on those tears and pull a fainting spell!

Night Must Fall (M.G.M.): Another film about a psychopathic murderer. Not quite as repulsive as *Love from a Stranger*, but in the same class. Most of the critics, in greeting this film, have "found" Robert Montgomery as an actor who is capable of playing dramatic parts. Evidently they have forgotten his swell performance in *The Big House*.

Café Metropole (20th Century-Fox): What might have been a satiric film about rich American girls marrying fortune-hunting title holders turns out to be a very mild, romantic comedy about a young man who is framed into parading as a prince in order to catch a real American heiress. Even this might have resulted in slight satire hadn't the scenarists allowed the girl to know that the prince was really a Princeton lad and the Princeton lad really a right match for the girl since he comes from a wealthy family.

Shall We Dance? (R.K.O.-Radio): Another musical film for Fred Astaire's dancing feet. This new picture doesn't give Ginger Rogers the break she deserves, and suffers from

a poor Gershwin score and flabby Gershwin lyrics.

Call to Arms (Amkino): An important theme: the defense of the Soviet Union against Nazi invasion. The film suffers from an artificial story and poor production. The actors as usual are of high caliber. Both *We Are from Kronstadt* and *Frontier* established high standards (on the same theme) that will be difficult to beat or even match.

Dr. Knock (French Motion Picture Corp.—at Cinema de Paris, N. Y.): An amusing celluloid version of Jules Romains's play about commercialized medicine—expertly played and capably directed by Louis Jouvet, who was the Spanish priest in *La Kermesse Héroïque* (*Carnival in Flanders*).

Another piece of evidence that Pathé News is by far the most reactionary newsreel in the business is in their version of the May Day parade. There are short views of the marchers. The commentator says: "Not allegiance to America," and we are shown the reviewing stand. At this point the editor cuts in the original soundtrack (breaking in on the end of a slogan) which says "... and to defend the Soviet Union." Something should be done about Pathé.

PETER ELLIS.

CONCERT MUSIC

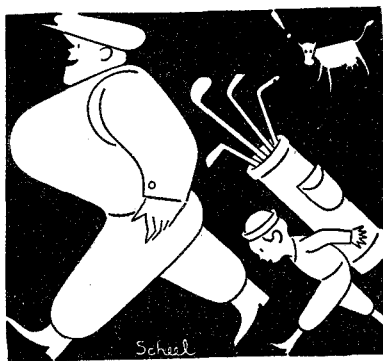
NATIONAL MUSIC WEEK... Mother's Day... and (according to a store window I glimpsed before I was able to avert my eyes) Baby Week. It's all too much for me. The gargantuan programs of the Federal Music Project's Festival of American Music, the Westminster, Rochester, Cincinnati, *et al*, festivals, are fatiguing merely to read, gagging whatever appetite for music is left at the tag end of the concert season. It isn't impossible (although it's usually difficult) to pick out items of interest or some laudable purposes in such festivals, but in actual operation they demonstrate no consideration for the listener, turn out to be the glorified shop talk of professional, semi-pro, and amateur music makers on a garrulous binge. An imposing list of first performances and novelties is written up for historians and program anno-

tators to chew over for years to come, the limitless vanity of composers and performers is partly appeased; what matter that the individual listener emerges with a splitting headache as the net contribution to his musical consciousness?

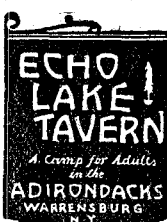
The other activities of the silly season, the "popular" opera presentations at the Hippodrome and the Metropolitan, the Goldman and other band concerts, the Stadium and similar summer symphonic series that are or soon will be upon us, are vastly more significant in that they do make a definite impact—for better or worse—on thousands of ears and minds. If their success and the consequent ability of the man in the street to whistle "La donna è mobile," "Celeste Aida," and the juiciest tunes of the "Unfinished" Symphony and *Tannhäuser* Overture is the test of a musical nation, we are rapidly approaching that goal. The impresarios are shoveling in the dollars and the doctors of music appreciation are rubbing their pudgy palms. No one seems to be taking thought of what the end will be. I suggest a look at those "most musical nations," Italy and Germany. Even before fascist control aborted every attempt of the creative urge to function, they were close to complete sterility in the tonal arts. And that soil is the breeding ground of more than æsthetic vermin carriers. Once your arts, like your politics, are split into watertight compartments of sterile academicism and popular narcoticism, you have straight thinking and honest feeling effectively stupefied. The next step is inevitable, and it, as well, can happen here.

But to stick to music, I am more than ever convinced that concerts as we have them here and today are giving rise to a tiny group of esoteric æsthètes on the one hand and on the other to a vast limp crowd vibrating only to tonal demagoggerel such as is fashioned consciously by a Respighi or twisted to shape as the demagogue conductors have twisted Beethoven and Wagner and many another. Victoria and Buxtehude and Bach didn't write for an anæmic intelligentsia, but willy-nilly one must become part of such a coterie to hear their works today. And with the change in audience comes a change in approach: preciousness and emasculation. This is a highbrow concert; it expects you to be and treats you like a dilettante. If you don't like that, you have your choice of the lowbrow concert where you are treated like a simpleton.

A new mass approach is obviously called for, but so far the most nearly successful experiments are those most dependent on extra-musical factors, particularly those in which music is subordinated in works conceived primarily for the stage, the films, or the dance. Development of the mass appeal of pure music has been almost negligible, yet I for one re-



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fuse to abandon hope that it will arrive.

One way, mass participation, or rather music-making in many small groups, has its pioneer workers, but it is quixotic to hope for too much until we have more and better conductors and musical organizers than we have now or are likely to have for a long time. More tangible and promising results have already been achieved in two other media, radio and recording. Unlike a play, film, or ballet, which necessarily has to trade on the lowest common denominator in a mass of psychologies, the broadcast and disk make their impact on a social group that is not only larger, but one representing the sum total of myriad individual minds.

This ideal and potentially almost unlimited audience is scarcely tapped as yet. The public for a film like *The Wave* or even *Fury* is small beside the millions mesmerized by the baby stares of Shirley Temple and Robert Taylor, but large in comparison to that commanded by the admirable broadcasts of a station like WQXR (reaching only a tiny percentage of listeners in the New York district) or even that dialing the catholic programs of Wallenstein, Barlow, Black, and the C.B.S. American School of the Air. And the circulation of disks like Musicraft's Buxtehude Cantatas and Victor's Ricercare from Bach's *Musikalisches Opfer* is still measured in the dozens or hundreds where Toscanini's Wagnerian vehemences are sold by the thousands. But these steps are as surely in the right direction as the music festivals are heading up a blind alley and the popular concert and opera seasons into a morass.

Those of us who have been hearing these broadcasts and disks (the superb Buxtehude cantata, *Singet dem Herrn*, has been flooding my mind most recently) haven't had to filter out tonal joys from countless diverting annoyances in a stuffy concert hall or a stuffier church. We haven't had to align with either a snobbish or a bovine audience. We have listened alone or in friendly groups, but we have known that we were not alone or a scant few: we have identified ourselves not only with our contemporaries who are seeking the same magical experiences, but with a great tradition of the tonal giants and everyone whose blood has ever quickened to their music.

R. D. DARRELL.

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