

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

Documentary of Tennessee Life

FRONTIER FILMS has released its long-awaited picture of life in the Tennessee highlands, called *People of the Cumberland*. Pare Lorenz' *Plow That Broke the Plains* told the economic story of the Western grasslands; *The River* followed eastward with a picture of life in the Mississippi basin; and now Frontier opens another volume of cinematic regionalism with a land still farther east. American documentaries, of which these three are the best, have occupied themselves mainly with rural life, getting down to earth, not yet setting their tripods in the city. Frontier is at work on a picture about civil liberties, which will naturally involve urban industrial life, but, until then, the non-fiction film in America stands on its stirring treatment of agricultural areas.

Erskine Caldwell wrote the narrative for *People of the Cumberland*, an essay about the pure English stock emerging from the colonial era two hundred years late. They are standing on their feet and organizing, with the reawakened spirit of their ancestors, in the Appalachian blue grass. The film tells about organization in textiles and mines and the work of the Highlander Folk School, that brave stockade of progress in the wilderness, where labor missionaries guide the renaissance of highland culture.

The neanderthal boss-class in these hills has enforced a hideous manner of life. There are company towns in the coal fields like concentration camps in the depth of virgin forest, where to be a union organizer is more dangerous than was scouting in the Dark and Bloody Grounds.

Frontier handles the exciting story of a whole land and its people with the fine sense of film we expect from its cameramen and directors. The musical score by Alex North

compares with Virgil Thomson's sound track for *The River* and the camera work by Ralph Steiner is clean and composed, using still shots in the opening sequences to set the scene. Frontier is the nuclear group for the making of great labor films. They have begun handsomely with an inexpensive form, the documentary, and have endowed it with most of the interest Hollywood gets into expensive fictions.

The film was directed by Robert Stebbins and Eugene Hill, who have tied all the aspects of their subject into an impressive unity. *People of the Cumberland* will open at the Cameo where it should be received with pride by the labor movement.

The good old pictures return like the ghost of last Christmas to haunt Hollywood. The best movie of the week is four years old. *It Happened One Night* is one of a series of revivals with which Hollywood hopes to keep the theaters open until something is done about the rubbish being ground off in the West today.

Frank Capra's picture of the nasty rich girl who runs smack into American life on a bus ride from Miami to New York is as fresh as it was in the second year of the New Deal. An uncommonly honest director, with a brilliant script by Robert Riskin, took a long look over the high walls around Hollywood and brought to the screen incidents with which the eighty millions who go to the movies could identify themselves. The thrill of *It Happened One Night* is not vicarious—it is a glad cry of recognition for everyone who has heard bus tires buzzing on a wet road or exchanged autobiographies with the stranger in the next seat. Nor is the beauty of the picture a matter of plot. The acidulous reporter who sasses his boss, gets drunk, and wins the rich girl by his contempt, is a stock item in Hollywood. What we saw here for the first time so expertly done were the details: the line-up for the outdoor shower in a tourist camp, the freight train crossing in front of a love-smitten reporter's flivver and the engineer, brakeman, and box-car passengers waving happily to him. We saw the insides of real tourist cabins, people in the bus skylarking in the night in a rare moment of family feeling, even the man whispering to a station attendant and getting pantomime directions to the privy.

They knew Capra had a good picture—he and the stars got Academy awards and Columbia Pictures had a huge money-maker. Capra and Riskin made next *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, and reiterated their regard for the facts of life.

Everyone would like to see more like *It Happened One Night*, but the successors of the masterpiece were progressively weaker copies without the feeling and the direct references of the original. Well, as Sam Gold-

wyn says, the public is on strike against bad pictures, and what hurts worst, they are on strike against Sam Goldwyn's bad pictures. Reviving old hits is a pretty poor way of solving the attendance problem. Throwing Will Hays overboard and turning cameras into the streets and fields is my home remedy for what ails the movie industry.

John Ericsson, Victor of Hampton Roads is the name of a curious Swedish picture about the American Civil War, now playing at the Fifth Avenue Playhouse. Ericsson was the inventor of the armor-plated gunboat, *Monitor*, which broke Southern sea power in the famous duel with the Confederate floating fortress, *Merrimac*, at Hampton Roads. The picture is a respectful, literal, and sluggish business, interesting because it is the first European film about American history.

Yellow Jack at the Capitol is a reasonable facsimile of Sidney Howard's play of the fight against yellow fever during the construction of the Panama Canal. Robert Montgomery gets out of his Brooks Brothers grouse jacket, away from such stinkers as *The First Hundred Years*, to approximate his brilliant accomplishment in *Night Must Fall*. There has been a shift in emphasis from the play which was about an event to a personal drama proper for the stature of movie stars. The damage is slight considering the expert and significant production given to the work by MGM.

Paul de Kruif's documentation for the original Howard play is a case study of the need for governmental solution of public-health problems. Not only yellow fever but all of the ill health of the American environment could be as well disposed of by the technique used forty years ago. Movies like

Recently Recommended Plays

Prologue to Glory (Maxine Elliott, N. Y.). Federal Theatre production of E. P. Conkle's play about Lincoln's early life, the affair with Ann Rutledge, and his first steps away from the life of the New Salem country store.

Plant in the Sun (Bayes, N. Y.). Ben Bengal's play of uncommon appeal and charm, combining strike fervor with juvenile tenderness and roughneck comedy. On the same program is Philip Stevenson's *Transit*.

One-third of a Nation (Adelphi, N. Y.). The current issue of *The Living Newspaper*, headlining the lack of adequate housing for President Roosevelt's 33 1-3 percent, and emphasizing the need for action. Thoroughly documented, witty, and admirably produced.

Recently Recommended Movies

The Fight for Peace. Pulls no punches in telling America how fascism makes war. Fails to answer the question it poses, but is, nevertheless, a powerful indictment of aggression.

The Adventures of Robin Hood. A beautiful screen restoration of the old legend of the British outlaw who robbed the rich to give to the poor. The cast, headed by Errol Flynn as Robin Hood, is excellent.

Test Pilot. Spencer Tracy, Clark Gable, and Myrna Loy in an exciting melodrama of stunts in the air and drinks on the ground with notable montage work by Slavko Vorkapitch in the air scenes.

There's Always a Woman. A variation on *The Thin Man* sort of thing. In it are Melvyn Douglas, Mary Astor, and Joan Blondell, who begins to look like our best comedienne.

Lonely White Sail. Taken from Valentin Kataev's novel of the aftermath of the revolt on the armored cruiser, *Potemkin*. A fine and stirring Soviet film.

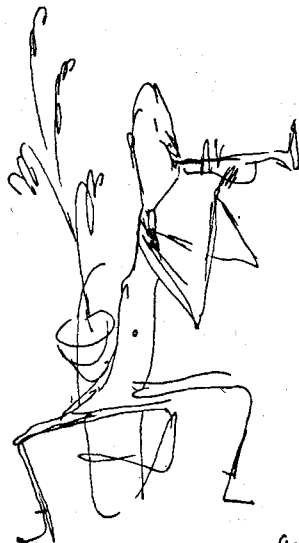
Yellow Jack serve to bring these facts to the public and in a vastly entertaining way.

JAMES DUGAN.

Political Night Life

AT Chez Firehouse in New York's night-club area, the Theatre Arts Committee has set up its light artillery to barrage the enemy with songs, gags, dances, and sketches. Cabaret TAC is what they call their political potpourri, deriving its name from the initials of the sponsoring committee, composed of a large number of anti-fascist theater workers: dramatists, actors, designers, dancers, musicians, critics, managers, producers, call-boys. For more than a year the Theatre Arts Committee has been running rallies and parties to aid loyalist Spain and China, and recently its members have branched out to build radio programs and prepare dance, film, and marionette productions through which they may express their convictions creatively.

Hiram Sherman, the priceless Firk of *Shoemaker's Holiday*, mc'd the show the night we saw it. Eleven numbers made up the two-hour program. We rate highest the group of songs sung by Earl Robinson, Michael Loring, and Leif Ericson. The "Joe Hill" and "Abe Lincoln" songs, written by Robinson and Al Hayes, are becoming favorites in the American workers' songbag. Emanuel Eisenberg's "Mittens," a burlesque on the Living Newspaper technique, was a neat *reductio ad absurdum*, hilariously received. Lotta Goslar's grotesque dances, seen in last year's *Peppermill Revue*, have proved themselves sure-fire with any audience. The ILGWU players came around after their night's work at Labor Stage to do the "One Big Union" number from *Pins and Needles*. Other skits and dances satirized a few of the many reactionary columnists, the Hague, the Warner Bros., Mussolini, and J'aime Berlin (credit Belfrage), the barrel-clad taxpayer, and other notables and nonentities. An anti-fascist schnitzelbank to which the audience gave all it had made a lusty ending. The



A.
A. Ajay

All Aid To SPAIN!



Tickets: 25c, 40c, 83c, \$1.10, \$1.65

Available at:

Med. Bur. & N. A. Comm., 381 4th Ave.; Workers Bookshops, 50 E. 13th St., N. Y. C.; 920 Prospect Ave., Bronx.; Leblang's, 43rd St. & Broadway, N. Y. C.

Auspices: Greater New York Committee

Medical Bureau and North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy
381 Fourth Ave., N. Y. C.

LIFT THE EMBARGO!

**MADISON SQUARE
GARDEN**

Thursday, June 9th at 8 P. M.

Speakers:

OJIER PRETECEILLE

UGT Representative

RAMON SENDER

Novelist

JOSE BERGAMIN

Catholic Philosopher

CARMEN MEANA

Social Worker of Madrid

JAY ALLEN

Distinguished Foreign Correspondent

DR. EDWARD BARSKY

Head International Hospitals in Spain—Just Returned! and other notables

DWIGHT DEERE WIMAN PRODUCTIONS

"A first
rate
musical
show."

Watts, Jr.
Herald
Tribune.

DENNIS
KING

VERA
ZORINA

VIVIENNE
SEGAL

WALTER
SLEZAK

in RODGERS' and HART'S Musical Comedy Hit

I MARRIED AN ANGEL

with Audrey Christie, Charles Walters and 50 Lovely Dancing Angels

• SHUBERT THEATRE, W. 44th St. Eves. 8:30. Mats. Wed. & Sat.

DUDLEY DIGGES

in Paul Osborn's Comedy Hit

ON BORROWED TIME

with FRANK CONROY • PETER HOLDEN

• LONGACRE THEATRE, W. 48 ST. Eves. 8:45. Mats. Wed. & Sat.

"The Best
Show in
Town."
—Walter
Winchell.



HEARTBREAK HOUSE

Mercury Theatre
—MERCURY PRODUCTIONS—
LAST PERFORMANCES
JULIUS CAESAR
National Theatre
CLOSES SAT., MAY 28TH

Seats Now for June, July and August

"PINS and NEEDLES"

HIT REVUE OF THE SEASON

with ILGWU Players. Music and Lyrics by Harold J. Rome.
Staged by Charles Friedman

NEW YORK—LABOR STAGE, 106 West 39th St., BR 9-1163.
Evenings 8:40; Matinees Wed. & Sat. 2:40
CHICAGO—Cohan's Grand Opera House.



REDUCE!

Special Introductory Trial Visit Offer

includes Swedish Massage — Electric Cabinets —
Individual Exercise — Suntan Lamps —
Badminton — Ping Pong — Handball —
Paddle Tennis — Posture Correction —
Bicycles, etc.
(THIS VISIT FREE IF YOU ENROLL)
courses as low as \$10 for 10 visits

ON THE ROOF

WOMEN ONLY

GOODWIN'S GYMNASIUM

1457 Broadway at 42nd Street

Wisconsin 7-8250

Please mention NEW MASSES when patronizing advertisers