

States? This is especially imperative in the case of Wagner where the hearing and understanding of the text are necessary for a full enjoyment of the music drama. "Tristan and Isolde" was sung successfully in English at the Metropolitan in 1920; why not today? The greatest tribute to the power of Wagner's music lies in the fact that it cannot be killed even by the unauthentic and unsatisfactory dramatic presentations that his music dramas generally receive.

An analysis of the social content and historical background of *Goetterdaemmerung* is beyond the scope of this article and has to be done in connection with the "Ring" as a whole. However, it can be pointed out that Wagner, more than any other composer, reflects the evolution of nineteenth century bourgeois society with all its inherent contradictions. Born in 1813 during the birth pangs of the German bourgeoisie, growing up under the Metternich reaction but with a strong though vague, romantic opposition to it, he participated actively on the side of the Russian anarchist, Bakunin, in the German Revolution of 1848. As a political exile during the next decades, he developed his new art style and wrote some of his epoch-making operas, while intellectually and emotionally he gradually adjusted himself to the status quo, just as during the same period the bourgeoisie, while rapidly expanding economically, made its peace with the monarchy under the threat of the proletarian revolts of the June days. Finally in the decade before his death in 1883, Wagner reached the culmination of his career in *Goetterdaemmerung* and *Parsifal* and in the presentation of all his works under his own direction at the opera house built especially for him by the King of Bavaria. During this time the German bourgeoisie had achieved its long desired unification by means of a servile submission to the Prussian monarch.

Then, like Siegfried, they went out to conquer new worlds. And they did it clothing themselves ideologically in the skins and helmets of the legendary heroes of the Wagnerian stage.

But the very contradictions of the nineteenth century neither Wagner nor the bourgeoisie understood. They became victims of tremendous intellectual and emotional confusion concerning the fundamental problems of man and society—a confusion which only Marx and Engels and their followers could understand and resolve. Never has the destruction of the world of gods and of men been portrayed musically with such grandeur, breadth, and dignity as in the "Dusk of the Gods." But Wagner as a member of his class could sense only eventual destruction. He could and would not see the rise of a new world, not of gods, but of men—of a brotherhood of men as proclaimed, even though naively, in Mozart's "Magic Flute."

As the whole world of the gods and heroes crashes to its doom at the close of the "Dusk of the Gods," the stage is filled by a great mass of people (represented in the Metropolitan by four men and three women) who are left behind but who, as servants and vassals, are mere unimportant spectators without any relation to the great tragedy that has just come to a close. They are thus ignored in the same way Wagner in real life ignored the great masses of the German people. One interpretation of the Finale has been that only after the conniving gods and heroes have been destroyed can the people hope for a new world of freedom. While this is objectively true, there is nothing to show that Wagner felt that way. He was interested mainly in gods—and himself.

Wagner's strength and historical-musical significance lie not in the complex confusion of progressive and reactionary ideas expressed in his writings and dramas, but in the great

driving force and power of his creative musical genius. And just because music is the most abstract of all artistic mediums, the sweeping grandeur, emotional depth, and dignity of his music (though at times theatrical) will long outlast much of the specifically mystic and reactionary philosophy of the text—just as the German people will long outlive the comic-tragic third rate impersonations of Siegfried-Wotan, Fafner, and Alberich by Hitler, Goering, and Goebbels struggling for the possession of and under the curse of the gold. It is significant that with all the Nazi propaganda for Wagner, the "Dusk of the Gods" has never been very popular with the pseudo-gods of fascism, for they probably sense in it their own doom which is now descending upon them in Africa and on the steppes of Soviet Russia.

PAUL ROSAS.

## Battered Formulas

*And the Ale and Quail Club disappears too soon.*

"THE PALM BEACH STORY" begins with a good gag; *Life Begins at Eight-Thirty* ends with a good gag; and between those two laughs this reviewer had to spend upward of three blank and pointless hours watching the screen. Of the two films, the former is the more disappointing, if only because we still expect a good deal from Preston Sturges. For a moment it looks as if we are going to get it. All films must waste several minutes at the start in screen credits—a necessary evil, since screen credits are the one sure way of protecting the rights of authors, musicians, designers, and others. Impatience with this lost time has led many directors to use fantastic devices for pepping up those screen credits. They may be photographed against scenic backgrounds, written in sand and washed out by waves, set up in glaring electric lights, engraved on the pages of an imaginary book—even, in one case, scratched upon dilapidated signboards pointing the way across a fearsome marsh. The net result is to make them ostentatiously silly. Printing them in neat plain letters remains the best way out—and yet, in the introduction of *The Palm Beach Story*, Preston Sturges has introduced a really effective way of brightening them up. His screen credits are photographed against a background of vivid and violent action in pantomime by the film's stars, unexplained and enormously exciting. Claudette Colbert gets gagged and locked in a closet; Claudette gets into a wedding gown and tears off to church; Joel McCrea wrestles with his clothes in a taxi; a nameless maid faints several times in several places. You can hardly wait to find out what it's all about. So the picture never tells you.

Instead, it jumps five years into the future of its newly married pair, and applies Formula II B (Husband Loses Wife, Husband Chases Wife, Husband Catches Wife). Divorce, as a way of solving marital difficulties, is tabooed to the film by the Hays Office;



"Double Portrait" (M. and Mme. Jacques Lipchitz) by Amedeo Modigliani, and "Woman Walking" by Gaston Lachaise. From the exhibit of "Twentieth Century Portraits" at the Museum of Modern Art, N. Y. C.

## STEAL A MARCH ON TIME!

WHEN you read the morning newspaper, do you see the pattern behind the headlines? Do you *think hard*—*think fast* in a world moving at a faster tempo?

Prepare *today* to do your part *tomorrow*—attend evening courses at the SCHOOL FOR DEMOCRACY in "How Society Works," "The Inside Story of India," "What Henry Wallace's *March of Freedom* Means," "What's Happening Today?" "What Is Right and Wrong?" "How the United Nations Can Win the War"—All planned to give you the *key* to the *realities* of the times in which we live.

Term begins January 4th. Write *now* for complete catalog of 50 evening courses in history, politics, social work, art, writing, music, science and languages.

### SCHOOL FOR DEMOCRACY

13 Astor Place, N. Y.

GR amercy 7-4086

Registration now going on from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

## PROMPT PRESS

### PRINTERS

113 FOURTH AVE., N. Y.

GRAMERCY 7-8582

## UNION SHOP

therefore, when a film-maker has divorce on his mind (and he often does), he must show it as a foolish mistake, to be undone in the last reel. Certainly *The Palm Beach Story* suffers from no lack of mistakes.

Among them is an organization called the Ale and Quail Club, a group of inebriate hunters traveling to Georgia (where they have quail, among other things) in a private railroad car full of sporting dogs. Much might have been done with this. But the promising club merely gets drunk, starts shooting holes in whiskey bottles, and disappears into the night.

Thus too with one John D. Hackensacker III, a respectable and penny-counting billionaire, haunted by the precepts of his grandfather. Somebody had a good idea in John D.; somebody had no more sense than to hand him over to Rudy Vallee and let him croon 'neath his lady's window. As for the plot, it develops into a duplication of Rosalind Russell's *Take a Letter, Darling* so exact as to be a little scandalous even among formula films. The ending beggars description. Nonsense, to be fun, should be intentional.

"LIFE BEGINS AT EIGHT-THIRTY" uses a formula only slightly less battered—call it IV C with a dash of corn. (Actor Wrecks Career, Actor Recaptures Career, Actor Wrecks Career All Over Again.) Our actor, a whiskery old gent who can play Santa Claus without makeup, has an unexplained craving for strong drink. Such things have been known; but life does not usually accompany its pickled hams with frail, wistful, devoted, crippled daughters who can't marry because they have to nurse Daddy through his hangover. *Life Begins at Eight-Thirty* does, however. Constant moviegoers will be able to fill in the rest for themselves. Suffice it to say that Daddy, given his big chance for a comeback as King Lear, turns up on opening night in a Disgusting Condition. Daughter Gives Up All yet once more; Daddy, overhearing her renunciation, is inspired to make a final noble gesture—not quite the one you are led to expect, hence a fairly effective curtain line.

Badly translated into screen terms from an unsuccessful Emlyn Williams play, the film unaccountably throws away its one real chance of being interesting—that of letting us see the actor act. One speech from *King Lear* would have revived us enormously; William Shakespeare, however, is kept firmly in the background.

What style and glitter the film does possess are entirely due to Monty Woolley's performance as the broken-down actor. Acid as a Dorothy Thompson comment on Clare Luce, Mr. Woolley saves the role from the lachrymose tediousness with which it is written. He is a conscious scoundrel, a slyly unregenerate souse—he makes no pretenses, even to himself. There is a great gap between Woolley and the film; his assurance is such that you cannot imagine him helplessly drunk, cannot imagine him noble and melting, cer-

## NEW MASSES

### CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

50c a line. Payable in Advance. Min. charge \$1.50  
Approx. 7 words to a line Deadline Fri. 4 p.m.

#### AGENTS WANTED

AGENTS WANTED to get subscriptions for NEW MASSES. Substantial commissions paid and leads given. For details communicate with Martha Strumpf, Circulation Manager, NEW MASSES, 461 4th Ave., N. Y. C.

#### APARTMENT WANTED

Modern, completely furnished apartment near subway-midtown for three months. Not more than \$50 per month. P. O. Box 1810, N. M., 461 Fourth Ave., N. Y.

#### GYMNASIUM

Get in shape. Reduce—build up—relax. Trial visit \$2.00 includes Swedish massage, handball, vapor baths, individual exercise, posture correction, electric horse, bicycles, etc. Men, women, separate days. GOODWIN'S GYM. 1457 Broadway. WI sconsin 7-8250.

#### INSURANCE

PAUL CROSBIE and CARL BRODSKY — whatever your needs — FREQUENT SAVINGS, 799 Broadway. TRADE UNION AGENCY, Tel. GR amercy 7-5978.

#### MANUSCRIPT TYPING

Manuscripts neatly and efficiently typed. Union rates. Apply Box 1809, New Masses, 461 Fourth Avenue, N. Y. C.

#### WANTED FOR NEW MASSES

Issues from January and February 1942 wanted to complete our files. Also 1934—January 2, 1935—December 17; 1937—May 4, July 20, Dec. 28; 1938—October 11; 1939—July 4; 1941—December 9.

#### WANTED—PIANO

Second-hand upright or spinet piano in good condition. Box 1804, New Masses, 461 Fourth Ave., N. Y. C.

## SUBSCRIBERS PLEASE NOTE!

Because of war conditions, the following will not be available until the end of January:

BRITAIN AND THE WORLD FRONT  
by R. PALME DUTT

CANTE FLAMENCO

GUERRILLA SONGS OF YUGOSLAVIA  
Albums of recordings

## THANKS TO RUSSIA CHRISTMAS PARTY

Saturday, December 26th, at 9 P.M.

RIVERSIDE PLAZA

73rd St. West of Broadway

CONCERT • DANCING • BUFFET

Admission \$1.65

Jan Brunesco and his Orchestra  
Basil Fomeen, Master of Ceremonies  
Rachelle Shubow, Pianist  
Miguelita, Mexican Dancer  
and many others

Auspices: West Side Committee of Russian War Relief, 2488 Broadway, N. Y. C.



tainly cannot imagine him playing the pitiful tragedy of Lear with any sort of understanding. But Mr. Woolley is much better than the film; so who cares?

RECENT Hollywood news, good and bad, includes the denial by Harry Scherman, in response to the OWI's question, of "any intention of producing" a remake of *Birth of a Nation*; and new censorship regulations governing the export of films. Gangster films are among those barred. No one is likely to weep about that. More serious, however, is the decision barring export of any film showing riots, lynchings, and "too vivid portrayal of underprivileged groups such as sharecroppers or slum dwellers." There seems no valid reason why we should deny that such things exist, either to ourselves or our neighbors; and what Hollywood cannot export to the foreign market it is not likely to film, so that our films may shortly resume the ostrich posture. Just now, when the film industry is gaining new consciousness of its function as a force for social improvement, such taboos come as a severe setback.

JOY DAVIDMAN.

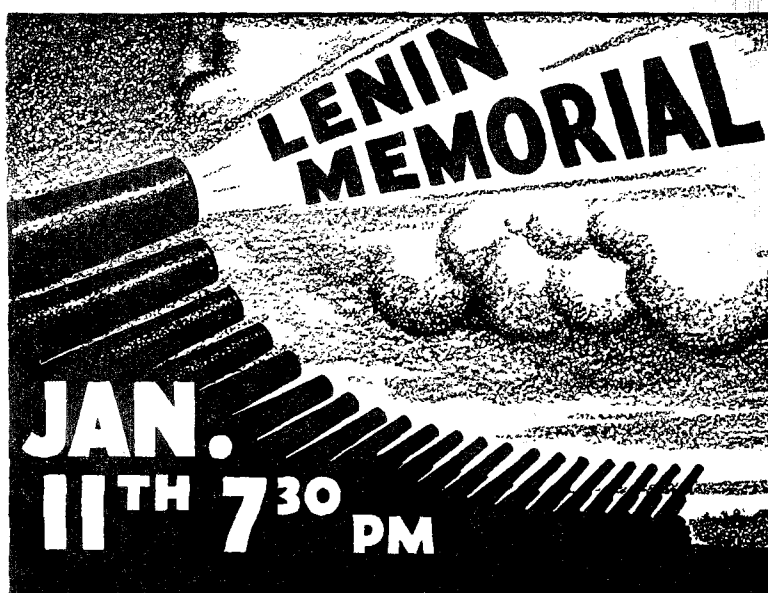
## Weep for the Willow

WHEN Mara Sutro was born her father planted a weeping willow tree. When her sister Bessie was born, he planted an apple. One stands and weeps; one bears fruit. This is John Patrick's "symbol" for the essential difference in temperament and fate that awaits his two sisters in *The Willow and I*. It's a cheap symbol, and a cheap play.

Sister Bessie, the luscious, steals Mara's fiance from her on her wedding day, by threatening to take her own life. They grapple for the pistol, it goes off, and sister Mara, thinking she has killed her sister (who also loves the fiance), flies from reality into amnesia. It lasts for twenty years. And during those twenty years sister Bessie marries the fiance, has a son, loses her husband to death, sees her son grow up and marry, produce a son, and lose his own wife.

Then sister Mara's memory returns; and she finds herself an old woman, cheated of her life. Sister Bessie's guilty conscience has forced her to care for the helpless Mara all these years, but she has always hated her, and now tries again to cheat her of her memories by convincing her that her fiance forgot her (Mara) in the love Bessie gave him. It's all very sad—and all very sleazy. And it's accompanied by the expected thunder storms, pattering rain, dimly lit rooms, gloomy philosophy, and cheap optimism. You will not have to worry about seeing it; it will probably vanish before you read these words. More's the pity that Martha Scott (who revealed such talent in *Our Town*) is wasted on this concoction. Miss Scott can't do a thing with it, though she attempts to give dignity to the ludicrous.

ALVAH BESSIE.



Speaker:

EARL BROWDER . . . SPECTACULAR STAGE SHOW  
MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - 40c to \$1.65

TICKETS: WORKERS BOOKSHOP OR BOX OFFICE



## WORKERS SCHOOL WINTER TERM ★ 1943

Registration begins December 21; classes begin January 12

### COURSES THAT SPOTLIGHT THE WAR

Fundamental Problems of the War	The Negro People and the War
Problems of War Economy	The World Scene Weekly —
Literature and the World We Live In	Philosophy — Dialectical Materialism

### BASIC COURSES

American History	Political Economy
Marxism - Leninism	Marxism and the National Question
History of C.P.S.U.	Principles of Communism

and many other courses

For descriptive catalogue write or phone

35 East 12th Street

ALgonquin 4-1199

The Picture That Took America By Storm!

### "THE GOLEM" and "GYPSIES"

Genuine Gypsy Songs and Dances  
Continuous from 10:30 A.M. till midnight  
20c to 2 P.M. weekdays

IRVING PLACE IRVING PLACE  
AT 14th ST.  
Benefit Block Tickets at Reduced Prices—GB 5-9879

Viennese Food and Atmosphere

### LITTLE VIENNA RESTAURANT

Lunch 50c Dinner 65c

"Choice desserts to your heart's desire"  
Music

39 West 46th St.  
Tel. LO 3-7747

bet. 5th & 6th Aves  
Open Sundays

### RUSSIAN SKAZKA

★ Superlative Russian and American Cuisine  
★ Soviet-American Recordings  
DINNER, 75c  
Late Snacks 25c Beer & Wine  
17 Barrow Street  
IRT to Christopher St.  
Ind. Subway to W. 4th St.



Dramatic Story of Stalingrad's first fight for life!

### "FORTRESS ON THE VOLGA"

Written and produced by Alexei and Georgi Vassiliev, makers of "Chapayev."

Extra added attraction: Excerpts from SHOSTAKOVICH'S SEVENTH SYMPHONY.—Conducted by Leopold Stokowski and Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra.

Narrations by: Mme. Maxim Litvinoff and Edward C. Robinson.

Cont. from 9 A.M.—25c to 1 P.M. exc. Sat., Sun. and Hol.

STANLEY THEATRE 7th Ave., bet. 41-42 Sts.  
WI 7-9686



### Everything Spanish at LA CASITA

• FOOD  
• WINES  
• ENTERTAINMENT  
• MUSIC

49 Grove St.  
New York City

Ch 3-9449