



SIGHTS and SOUNDS

THE RESISTANCE SPEAKS IN FILMS

By **DEREK KARTUN**

Paris, by mail.

IMMEDIATELY after the Liberation, a group of French film technicians and writers got together to discuss the future of their art and ways of helping it to play its full part in the new life that everyone expected for France. Under the leadership of Louis Daquin, Secretary of the Cine-technicians' Union, they founded the first film production cooperative, "*La Cooperative Generale du Cinema Francais*." Their aim was to tell the story of the people's resistance through films; to tell it simply and clearly in the tradition of classic French lucidity and artistic discipline, without the tormented overlay of neurosis and obsession with the macabre and the hopeless which was the French cinema's way of expressing its lack of faith in the life of pre-war capitalist France.

Though hopes of a nationalized film

industry faded, the cooperative did not wilt away. In May 1945, it started work on its first big picture, *Bataille du Rail* (Battle of the Railroad), which tells the story of the resistance of the French railway workers to the German invaders. Rene Clement, who directed and wrote the script, toured every part of France, talked with hundreds of railwaymen, collected stories of actual resistance experiences and soaked himself in the atmosphere of railroading. He used very few professional actors—and those unknown—relying almost entirely on the railway workers themselves. *Bataille du Rail* proves once again that great qualities of realism and sincerity can be got by asking people to repeat in front of a camera the jobs they have done and the phrases they have used for many years. Any competent actor can learn how to tap an axle-box with a

twelve-pound hammer; but Clement holds that he will never do it with quite the realism of a railwayman who has tapped thousands of axle-boxes every year of his working life. This has produced brilliant effects of reality, similar to those of *The Baker's Wife* before the war.

The cooperative has done more than produce a good film. It has given talented young technicians a chance to prove their worth. Both Clement and Alekan are under thirty; neither has made a big picture before. In this cooperative undertaking both have waived part of their salaries in return for a percentage of the profits. This principle has been followed by the other members of the production unit and is, of course, the basis of the cooperative method of production. Apart from those who worked on the film, all of whom, from producer to call-boy, have "shares" in the production, people not directly associated with the work can share on the usual cooperative lines. It is to the credit of the French government that, through the General Directorate of the Cinema, they have advanced part of the money necessary to make *Bataille du Rail*. The balance was furnished by the railwaymen's resistance group.

In view of the fact that full commercial distribution has been assured in France the film will certainly make a profit. On its merits it deserves wide distribution in Britain and America, where it can do the same job for friendship between the three countries that *Desert Victory* and *The True Glory* did in France.

The cooperative has another film, *Dawn on the Sixth of June*, in the cutting stage. This documentary, lasting an hour and a half, and directed by Jean Gremillon, deals with the history of Normandy and includes the two great British landings—in the Hundred Years' War and in 1944.

Other films in preparation are *Comedy Before Moliere's Day* and *Vercors*—both documentaries—the latter consisting in large part of shots taken during the Maquis' bitterest days of fighting during the occupation in the



A close-up from "*Bataille du Rail*." The French engine crew—played by real railway workers—of the German train are in the plot to prevent the train from reaching the Normandy front.

Dance for Dushenka

Time:

Sat., Jan. 26 — 8:30 pm.

Place:

FREE WORLD HOUSE

144 Bleecker St. (Near West B'way)

Auspices of:

AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR

RUSSIAN RELIEF

GREENWICH VILLAGE-GRAMERCY PARK
COMMITTEE

Music:

RALPH HAYES and His Orchestra
(formerly with Kate Smith)

Entertainment:

HENRY MORGAN—radio comedian
and satirist

JEANNETTE WELLS—folk singer
and other STAR ENTERTAINERS

FOOD AND BAR

Benefit of:

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Vercors region. *The Devil Sighs* and *If the Young Knew* are two feature films planned for production during the coming year. Louis Daquin hopes soon to have a distributors cooperative to work with his production units, bringing independence of the big commercial distributors.

At a time when all the indications are that the French cinema is travelling the Hollywood road of ever higher production costs, leading to ever greater financial interference with the work of producers (and all that this implies in the matter of "playing safe" and the box office test), *La Cooperative Generale du Cinema Francais* has an extremely important job to do in defending the high artistic standards of French films.

On Broadway

"A WINTER'S TALE" (Theater Guild production at the Cort Theater) is one of the plays of Shakespeare's old age. Esthete critics have found qualities in it, as in the other plays of this period, which they particularly relish. The presumption is that by then Shakespeare had outlived the vulgar turmoils of life, and arrived at a wise serenity which these plays reflect. "Purified" of his interest in history he had come to a perfect fantasy unstained by reality.

I have looked in these plays for the values so cherished by the esthete critics. What I have found is that the poetry is more concise and exact; but it is doubtful whether this gain balances the loss in the suppleness and eloquence of the earlier poetry. And the purest of fantasy could never compensate for the loss of that magnificent sense of life, at all levels of consciousness, that provides, in the great tragedies, a far more potent magic than Prospero's wand or the *Winter's Tale's* Delphic oracle.

Though still the work of a master, *A Winter's Tale*—like the *Tempest*, which it falls short of—descends with a sort of senile need for ease into the conventions—or the corn—of its time. Particularly offensive is its descent into the Renaissance convention which assigned all human nobility to the "nobly" born, and all stupidity and boorishness to the commonalty.

As drama *A Winter's Tale* is a tour de force, an almost exact mixture of tragedy and comic masque. Its first half, a study of sexual jealousy, is poor in the psychological insights of the earlier plays, and is almost entirely in the overblown melodramatic convention of the time.

The second half is a masque rather awkward in its gambols and fantasy rather burdensome to the mind, which is called upon to sag to depths rather than soar to heights.

Shakespeare's consummate craftsmanship carries off the tour de force. The two parts hold together. And the reward of the poetry is still sufficient to keep the night from being ill spent. But considering the several great Shakespeare plays not yet seen here in the past decade, one feels that the Theater Guild has misspent its and the audience's time. Its production is in the smooth and lavish Guild tradition, but it is curiously unimpressive, though Henry Daniell and the supporting cast succeed, for part of the time, in being credible in incredible roles. Where the production comes off poorest is in its song and dance which, despite some good stepping, is over-arch and affected.

IN *The Would-Be Gentleman* (at the Booth) Moliere's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* is reduced in content to a vaudeville skit then reexpanded into a two-hour burlesque, a process which spreads the meager substance far too thin to sustain interest. Bobby Clark is a superb comic, but one clown doesn't make a circus: what would be hilarious for its best ten minutes becomes tiresome beyond that. Time, and familiarity with the animal, may have dulled the point and the comedy of Moliere's satire of the emerging bourgeoisie. It may therefore have been worth sacrificing some of the comedy and the satire for some of Bobby Clark's clowning; but not the whole play. ISIDOR SCHNEIDER.

Records

LOVERS of modern music can rejoice in this month's output of recordings by Victor and Columbia. The choice is excellent and the quality of reproduction high. Victor gives us Leonard Bernstein's "Jeremiah" Symphony and Darius Milhaud's *Protee Suite*, and Columbia, Shostakovich's Sixth Symphony—a varied international offering.

Leonard Bernstein's "Jeremiah" was completed in 1942 and won the Critics Circle award in 1944. This excellent recording by the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, conducted by the composer, reenforces the robust impression the work made two years ago as an energetic piece of craftsmanship, technically adept in instrumentation and thematic development, and deserving of a permanent place in the musical repertory. One might add, however, that