

Music to My Ears

SUR LES PONTS DE PERPIGNAN

PERPIGNAN.

MUSICALLY speaking, the city of Perpignan in the Pyrénées-Orientales corner of France is significant only for the refuge that the nearby town of Prades has given to Pablo Casals, a great musical figure of our day. When the cellist declared in 1945 that he would not play again in public until the world had rejected Franco's domination of his native Spain he captured the fancy of idealists everywhere. When he finally relented a year ago and consented to discourse his art for whosoever would make him a Mahomet he moved mountains of artistic attention to Prades, in the foothills of the Pyrenees.

This year the music-making has been relocated in Perpignan, an overgrown small town, because Prades was demonstrably unsuitable for the purpose assigned to it. Publicity has been widespread, and the affection in which Casals is held by the musical fraternity—string players especially—has moved such people as William Primrose, Paul Tortelier, Isaac Stern, Erica Morini, Rudolf Serkin, Myra Hess, Jennie Tourel, and Aksel Schiøtz to set aside a sizable amount of time to make Perpignan a new focal point on the European festival map. Out of the month's activity and a considerable by-product of recordings earnings to provide a comfortable annuity for Casals's twilight years could emerge.

The harsh fact is, however, that some of these artists—and a larger percentage of the paying public—are not likely to come back another year if the events of the first weekend can be considered as criteria. Save for a few book and picture shops in the heart of Perpignan, there is scant evidence that a festival exists and less that it is in progress. As a symptom of local liaison, one may mention that the shift of date from June (until April all publicity had focused on a June opening) to July was occasioned by Casals's desire that his festival not give aid and comfort to an annual Perpignan "Festival d'Art Dramatique" in June. He has the way clear for this year; but it will not be due to the "cooperation" of local hotels, restaurateurs, and hack drivers if there is a renewal next year. All have proceeded, to vary a phrase, on a theory of "No business as usual," with rather disquieting effects on persons—and there are quite a few of them here—who have been saving for a year to make Perpignan the central point of their European summer.

In the aftermath of the first con-

cert (in which Casals played a Bach suite, Myra Hess and Isaac Stern played Mozart concerti, and William Primrose joined the latter in Mozart's "Symphonie Concertante") and another terminated by rain halfway through (because no one had made provisions for such an "untoward" happening) the prognosis could hardly be a hopeful one. The whole thing, it seems to me, has placed an intolerably heavy burden on the slight shoulders of the seventy-four-year-old Casals. This year's orchestra is less efficient, in the general opinion, than last year's, and Casals does not have the temperament to make cohesion out of chaos. To vary the metaphor, one imagines that he could make superb music on any adequate cello; but he can scarcely build one—or an orchestra.

There were many wonderful moments in Casals's Bach—and a good many ragged ones—as there were deft touches and some coarse tonal gradations in the Hess Mozart. Stern's performance of the Mozart G major Concerto was bright, energetic, and quite overwhelmingly sensitive, as was his performance of the "Symphonie Concertante" with Primrose. In each, however, the surrounding musical design provided by the well-meaning but hardly expert orchestra directed by Casals moved in an aura of amateurism—semi-professional at best—hardly consonant with the intercontinental propaganda developed on behalf of the enterprise.

Improvisation is attractive in its

place, not least in music; but hardly when it involves the comfort, health, and good will of a thousand people. At that, "improvisation" is a generous term for the lack of foresight which exposed listeners at the second concert to a thorough drenching when rain fell—as it did all over Perpignan—on the open court in the primitive "palace" of the kings of Majorca. Messrs. Stern, Primrose, and Tortelier had spent dozens of hours preparing the great E flat Divertimento of Mozart as one of the features of the series; but it was rained out that night and irreplaceable the next because Stern and Primrose, depending on assurances that "it never rains in Perpignan" during July, had booked engagements far away for the immediate future. At that, they could have gone through with the performance had not a local functionary called the whole thing off midway in the evening without consulting the principals involved. Marcel Tabuteau, first oboe of the Philadelphia Orchestra, had left an unforgettable impression, considering the circumstances, with his performance in the wonderful quartet (K.370); but rain has never been considered an adjunct to fine oboe playing, even in Perpignan.

Among the various bridges crossing the stream that bisects Perpignan, there is unquestionably an important if invisible one concerned with the future of this festival. Unless a will to planning, organization, and more functionalism on a plane appropriate to its pretensions supplants the present fumbling and inefficiency there is little valid reason for urging anyone's attendance. If for none other than several practical reasons, Perpignan itself should certainly consider whether X mille francs is left here or elsewhere in France by music-minded tourists.

—IRVING KOLODIN.



Pablo Casals—"an unforgettable impression."

—Musical America.

SRL Goes to the Movies

HOW BAD MOVIES ARE BORN



"Our latest picture is so bad I'm afraid to release it—the only thing we can do is palm it off on television."

A few weeks ago I wrote in these columns describing "St. Benny the Dip," a particularly mediocre little film: "Perhaps Damon Runyon could have done something with the idea, but it was clearly beyond the powers of anyone employed on this picture." That is the sort of flippant line a film critic will often use to dismiss a movie, basing his judgment on what scholars refer to as "internal evidence." Obviously, the critic thinks that if the producers could have done something better they would have. In this instance I discovered recently that I was wrong.

It isn't very often that critics have the opportunity to go behind the scenes on a production and learn at first hand just where a picture gained its strength or why it soured. By the time he sees the film the people who made it have in all probability scattered to a dozen different studios. And, anyway, the critic is supposed to judge only the completed work, what the audience will see, not the skill with which the sound technician twirls his dials or the producer pares his budget. But every film critic—and probably every moviegoer as well—has at one time or another asked him-

self on leaving a theatre, "Why in the world was this thing ever made? What could the producers have seen in it to make them want to risk thousands of dollars on its production?"

True, these questions do not normally fall within the critic's province; but their answer, at least in the case of "St. Benny the Dip," is curiously informative, a clue to the reason for many of the bad pictures we all see. By chance a copy of George Auerbach's original screenplay for "St. Benny" came to my attention. I read it and found, to my astonishment, that it was really very good. Unlike the film, which is a feeble attempt at comedy, the original is quite serious, the characters three-dimensional and interesting, the theme thoughtful and mature. And, again in contrast to the film, the script had taste.

A few days later I met Auerbach himself, a slim, elderly, quietly humorous man. He had written innumerable scripts, he told me, most of which he has managed to sell, but "St. Benny" is one of the few that have been produced. "And what do you think of it?" I asked cautiously. "I haven't even seen it and don't intend to," he replied. I supplied him

with details of the innumerable differences, large and small, between his script and the completed picture, then asked him what had happened. The story goes something as follows.

Auerbach had written his script from an idea suggested by an item in *Time* magazine several years ago, something about a confidence man who had hid out successfully for months in the vestments of a priest. In developing this story Auerbach played with the notion that, no matter what a man was to begin with, to make good his disguise he would have to act the way others expected a priest to act and that this would eventually bring about a change in his own character. Auerbach multiplied *Time's* criminal by three and, because his story was in a way something of a parable, set the period back to the turn of the century.

He wrote his screenplay with the actors for his unholy trio firmly in mind. Marlon Brando was to play Benny, Monk would be Louis Calhern, and Roland Young, Matthew, the oldest, suavest, and most sinister of the three. He obtained commitments to do the picture from each. David Raksin, one of Hollywood's better composers, had already begun to sketch out the musical score. Auerbach, at one time a producer on the MGM lot, firmly intended to produce his script himself.

Now, financing a picture in Hollywood is a very tricky thing. First the producer must obtain "front money," money that is used to secure the film's stars and the script. On the basis of that security the actual production money is advanced. But unless "end money" can also be raised, money used to cover expenses should the film exceed its budget, that production money is not forthcoming. Although "end money" is rarely actually used and its rates are usuriously high, it normally carries with it the right of the lender to dictate changes in script, casting, and virtually every production detail. In this instance Auerbach could have gotten his "end money" only by dispensing with Brando (who had not yet made "The Men" or "Streetcar Named Desire") and Louis Calhern (this was before his appearances in "The Asphalt Jungle" and "The Magnificent Yankee"). Auerbach preferred to sell his script outright to the Danzigers instead, a pair of independent producers. And with that sale the author lost all control over his story.

The Danzigers seemed to like his basic idea, three con men disguising themselves as priests and running a

LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

Apollo. Bacchus. Ceres. Daphne. Europa. Fortuna. Ganymede. Helen. Iphigenia. Janus. Kedalion. Leda. Mercury. Niobe. Orpheus. Pandora. Quirinus. Rhea. Sisyphus. Tantalus. Uranus. Vesta. Woden. Xanthus. Ymir. Zephyr.