



## Twenty-three Seconds in Tuscaloosa

A WHITE reporter from the North interviewing a chief of police in the Deep South is a familiar commodity on the air. Such an interview becomes slightly more arresting when the Northern reporter happens to be a girl; but when the Southern chief of police and the white girl reporter from the North are father and daughter, you have a compelling broadcast situation. Listeners to WBAI-FM, the Pacifica Foundation's radio station in New York, encountered the experience recently in the first of a series of five programs, *You Must Go Home Again*, produced by Marcia Tompkins, the station's folio editor, in her initial program effort. The producer's home is Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and her father was formerly the city's police chief. She went home not long ago, plumped down a tape recorder in the living room, and asked her father for his views on the racial situation generally and in Tuscaloosa particularly. After seven seconds of silence, Mr. Tompkins emitted a vigorous "Well!" After eight more seconds of dead air, he sighed. After another eight seconds of the most pregnant pausing I have ever heard, he answered: "I would just as soon you'd leave the whole business alone." It was a moment of dramatic tension, charged with subtle, clashing emotions. For any listener, whether a racist or a civil rights advocate, the family conversation that preceded and followed these twenty-three seconds could not escape being a deeply moving experience.

The daughter groped for words to explain how Ted, a Negro friend up North, could be "an individual, a poor bridge player with a sense of humor." The parents tried to comprehend the emotional and intellectual distance that had developed between them and their child.

Hostile groups cast each other into enemy stereotypes, and they act toward each other in ways that confirm their reciprocal image. Miss Tompkins, in the bosom of her family, was partly "the enemy," yet she was also kin. This ambivalence of feeling and mood involved a listener strongly. There was more than personal journalism; indeed, the portrait of Tuscaloosa people, as evoked by Miss Tompkins's talks with a few citizens, had a literary quality. The producer spoke her own commentary, and her introductory remarks—in which she stated her motives in catching her home town on tape—were direct and lucid, deliv-

ered in an understated Alabama drawl that had both charm and unadorned honesty. One WBAI listener wrote the producer: "Although many of the views expressed will always be intolerable to me, I can hardly continue to assume that these people are faceless, moronic ogres."

THE second program in the series, by contrast, was revealing, but it reverted to public stereotypes. Miss Tompkins concealed a tape recorder (until it was discovered) at a Ku Klux Klan cross-burning and membership drive meeting in Tuscaloosa and gave us a word picture of the proceedings. A minister muttered an incomprehensible prayer and the electric organ played "Rock of Ages" over the stadium loudspeaker as white-robed Klansmen waved red lanterns around the burning cross in rhythm to the music. The effect was shocking, but I found myself wondering: If Miss Tompkins had been able to talk with the Klansmen in a family atmosphere, would there have been a difference? Does the individual quality of a Southern family make the difference? The producer's father admitted that police brutality existed in a nearby town, but he asserted it was not "official brutality" (as in Selma, Alabama, where



police were ordered to use tear gas and whips on Negro demonstrators).

Three other programs (which I have yet to hear) will deal with civil rights demonstrations in Tuscaloosa; with Mrs. Hugh D. Pallister, a remarkable white woman who boldly excoriates the local Klan; and with the confused but definitely shifting views of the town's younger white people toward more viable attitudes on Negro rights. WBAI's folio editor is a promising talent, and only a listener-sponsored station could provide her with so valuable an opportunity for self-expression. It is too much to hope, at this time, that WJRD, the commercial, independent station in Tuscaloosa, would play her tapes for the enlightenment of the whole Southern community, but the Pacifica stations in Los Angeles and San Francisco will play them, and educational radio stations (perhaps even the Voice of America) could make room for this sensitive series that challenges the impersonal drabness of so much of our mass-media reporting. —ROBERT LEWIS SHAYON.

## Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich and Yetta Arenstein

## WHAT GOES UP

Listed below are sixteen dismembered words containing the names of the eight notes in the musical scale, in ascending and descending order, each with its accompanying definition. Mrs. Thaddeus Seymour of Hanover, New Hampshire, wonders how many musical readers can make it up to high C and back down again. Answers on page 44.

1. D O \_ \_ \_ \_ \_
2. \_ R E \_ \_ \_ \_
3. \_ M I \_ \_ \_ \_
4. \_ F A \_ \_ \_ \_
5. \_ S O \_ \_ \_ \_
6. \_ L A \_ \_ \_ \_
7. \_ T I \_ \_ \_ \_
8. \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ D O
9. D O \_ \_ \_ \_ \_
10. \_ T I \_ \_ \_ \_
11. \_ L A \_ \_ \_ \_
12. \_ S O \_ \_ \_ \_
13. \_ F A \_ \_ \_ \_
14. \_ M I \_ \_ \_ \_
15. \_ R E \_ \_ \_ \_
16. \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ D O

Presumably  
Example  
Diminution of intensity  
Sponsor at baptism  
Ecstatic  
Excite pleasurably  
Imaginary; unbelievable  
Oriental punishment, beating  
Dwelling for sleeping  
Specify a condition  
Relating to two sides  
Out of harmony  
Simply worked articles  
A gloomy person  
Not terminated  
A criminal



## Truth and Consequences

THERE is an old British comedy that endeared itself to me through a scene in which the hero dashes into a rural railway station and demands from the guard the time of the next train. The fellow pulls out his watch, looks at it for a long minute, then solemnly declares, "The next train has just left." I have something of that feeling about Haskell Wexler's picture, *The Bus*, a documentary on the March on Washington in August of 1963. Although there has been a considerable, and regrettable, time lag between the events depicted and the present moment in history, recent occurrences in Selma suggest that the next bus has just left and is still a long way from its destination.

Mr. Wexler and his able cohorts, Mike Butler and Nell Cox, chose to make their film in what is known as the *cinéma vérité* or "direct cinema" technique—one that reduces the paraphernalia of picture-making to a light, portable camera, a couple of sun guns for illumination, and a synchronous tape machine to take down the conversations. If the general public has read a good deal more about "direct cinema" than it has been able to see on the screen, it is largely because of a predilection on the part of American picture-makers for *vérité* portraits of characters like Joseph E. Levine and the Beatles—who invariably have second thoughts by the time their sittings are completed and the releases are handed them to sign. Wexler, on the other hand, working in complete sympathy with the white and Negro riders on a bus from San Francisco to Washington, probably encountered no difficulty at all in getting releases from them. His problem was getting a release for his film.

It is a curious and disheartening fact of life that many a film is born to blush unseen simply because the distributors feel that they know what the public wants far better than the man who has poured his time, his talents, and—in this instance, at least—his own resources into making what he feels is timely and important. Although the entire civil rights movement has ardent supporters throughout the country, the people who sell pictures are certain that what moviegoers really want to see is Doris Day and Rock Hudson—or perhaps Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni. It is particularly ironic that *The Bus*, with its sharp sense of immediacy, should have encountered this type of delay.

On the other hand, for immediacy these days we look to television. And if

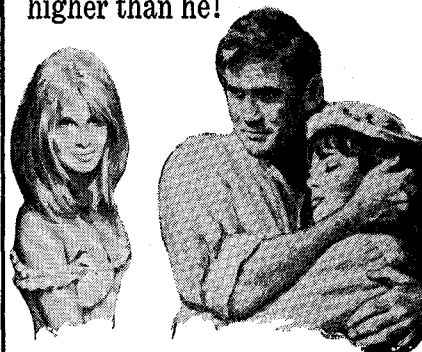
*The Bus* had no more to recommend it than the mere documentation of a specific event, there would be little justification for showing the film in theaters more than eighteen months after it happened. But, alas, civil liberties remains an issue, and eyes remain focused upon the struggle in the South. What *The Bus* offers so affectingly is the other side of the coin, the growing solidarity of ordinary people, both black and white, in opposition to discrimination and racial prejudice. It comes from the relaxed atmosphere within the bus itself. It comes from interviews with the riders and, perhaps even more tellingly, from interviews with the changing retinue of Greyhound drivers who, though uninvolved, are more than willing to speak their minds. And as the bus nears Washington in the early hours of morning, it comes from the sight of the dozens of other buses from all parts of the country that join it on the road, all headed for the same destination and mission, all charged with the same dedication.

In filming this 3,000-mile trek, Wexler and his crew shot untold thousands of feet of film. For this kind of picture, however, the footage becomes merely the raw material for meaningful assembly. The shots themselves might even be newsreel, with the microphone often nakedly and unabashedly visible within the frame. But where the newsreel and the television cameras capture the look of the moment, the edited documentary conveys the sense of the moment. And it is this sense that emerges from the ninety compact minutes of *The Bus*—simply and unadorned, a bit tardily, yet still charged with enormous meaning for our times.

FROM Israel, by way of the San Francisco Film Festival and the Academy Awards, comes a heart-warming, surprisingly self-critical little comedy called *Sallah*, the story of an Oriental Jew and his difficulties in adjusting to his new home (or homes) among his fellow Israeli. Sallah Shabati, played to the hilt by Haym Topol, is the kind of bumptious know-it-all who is generally more fun to meet on the screen than in person; but writer-director Ephraim Kishon keeps the gags coming, and Topol miraculously manages to keep his character from degenerating into a mere buffoon. The photography, by America's Floyd Crosby, affords a pleasantly unobtrusive documentary glimpse of Israel today.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.

A film based on the turbulent life of Sean O'Casey. No man was more earthy, none soared higher than he!



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FILM

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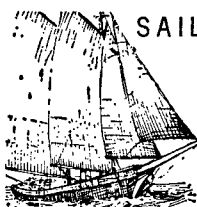
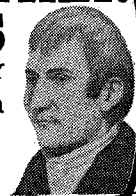
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