

A Cog In The Wheel



IT IS A TRADITION IN PICTURES (ONE OF the most stubbornly respected) that nobody in the world goes to hear a movie score but the composer, the orchestrator and other composers. As a kind of compensation, I suppose, they hear every single sixteenth note in the score and are thereafter equipped to discuss its most obscure subtleties. Frequently, however, they have to be told what the picture itself is about.

This has its parallel in another tradition in the

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movies with which every composer comes into contact as soon as he reports to a studio. It was probably devised by the first producer ever to use a musical score for a dramatic film and runs as follows: If the audience doesn't notice the music it's a good score. This I never could quite understand. I have heard many approving, even admiring comments—not all by composers—on scores for foreign pictures written by Auric, Honegger, Shostakovitch, Prokofieff, Françaix and others. Certainly an audience would not find such contributions out of place in an American picture merely because the characters spoke English rather than French, German or Russian.

Perhaps one of the reasons for the low repute of picture music may be found in the words that fill the air when a Hollywood score is discussed by those versed in such matters. You never hear any discussion of a score as a whole. Instead, the references are to "main-title" music, "end title" music, "montages," "inserts" and so on, with no recognition of the character of the complete score. It is much as if one would discuss a suit in terms of its buttonholes, pleats, basting and lining, without once considering its suitability to the figure it adorned.

Even so, this represents a considerable advance in

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the liberty formerly permitted movie composers. It is only within the last half-dozen years that a composer for the movies has been allowed to write anything other than a fanfare at the beginning and end of a picture. In the early days of the talkies the idea of writing music under dialogue was so revolutionary that a number of prominent producers (as, for example, Irving Thalberg) countenanced it only under the greatest pressure, and then but sparingly. They were not merely unfriendly to music; they were actually suspicious of its potentialities.

They made a great fetish, for example, of pointing out the conflict between the so-called "reality" of the movies and the "unreality" of music. Always when a situation seemed to demand a heightening by musical effect they would come back at the composer with the question, "But where would the audience think the orchestra is coming from?" This was supposed to be the stopper for all arguments. When a musical background was absolutely inseparable from an effect they would go to the most extravagant lengths to relate the music to the scene by having a band playing outside the window, or secreting a string quartet behind a row of potted palms or having the sound come out of a radio. Unquestionably it is

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an additional virtue to make music an integral part of a dramatic situation; but it always seemed to me an example of remarkable shortsightedness that even the best directors and producers could not reconcile themselves to the thought that they were dealing with a completely artificial medium and adapt themselves to it accordingly.

I might mention that one of the few early talkies I remember was the movie version of Barry's *Paris Bound*. My memory of its details is extremely hazy, but I do recall with some clarity a musical score for it by Arthur Alexander. In fact that is the only detail that I do recall eight or nine years after it appeared. The only reason that Alexander had the opportunity to write that score was that a ballet figured in the action, and it is customary, after all, for ballets to have music. In addition, the main character is a composer.

What was particularly preposterous about the producers' attitude was that music has been an accepted accessory of the legitimate theater for generations. I seem to recall, even, that Beethoven wrote incidental music for *Egmont*, Mendelssohn for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bizet for Daudet's *L'Arlésienne* and Grieg for *Peer Gynt*. Nobody peered around and

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asked, "Where is the orchestra coming from?" when they listened to such scores as these.

The only exception that was made in the early days of sound pictures in Hollywood was in musical comedies, where the girl walked into the room where the boy was seated at the piano. He would say, "Listen to this tune I just wrote . . ." whereupon she would sing it from the second bar on with every word in the lyric perfect. How many times I have envied the telepathic abilities of Jeanette MacDonald, Grace Moore, Lily Pons, Gladys Swarthout and the rest—especially after I found out how long it takes them actually to learn a tune.

However, my first experiences in Hollywood had nothing to do with music. I was hired (in 1929) as an actor, to play the part of a pianist in the screen version of *Burlesque*. I had played the role in the Arthur Hopkins production on Broadway, and it was the intention of the producing company to retain most of the original cast, only replacing Barbara Stanwyck with Nancy Carroll. I had utterly no desire to go to Hollywood, as I had just signed a song-writing contract with Max Dreyfuss at Harms. So the producer offered me "twice as much." This was mysterious to me, as my reluctance had nothing to do with the money I had

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been offered. My acceptance after this "twice-as-much" temptation had everything to do with it, however. The picture was made (for Paramount) as *The Dance of Life*—with no apologies to the late Havelock Ellis, though his fee for the title went into five figures.

Through the association with Dreyfuss my activities thereafter shifted to R.K.O. The vice-president in charge of production was William Le Baron, another émigré from Broadway, where he had written the lyrics for *Apple Blossoms*, among other chores. Through the friendly word spoken for me by Dreyfuss I was assigned to write several songs for *Street Girl*, the first talkie produced by R.K.O. Among them was "Lovable and Sweet," which was a big hit. However, in those days practically anything that got into a picture was a big hit.

I began to broaden out in my talents after this, becoming in fact a right-hand man for Le Baron, especially during the period prior to the production of *Cimarron*. I sat in on many conferences in which an actress for the leading feminine role was being discussed. I didn't know whom they should choose, but I was emphatically opposed to Irene Dunne, arguing that she was not the type. When this turned out to be the biggest money-maker in the firm's history and a per-

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sonal triumph for Dunne, somehow I found myself doing more and more music again.

Inasmuch as *Street Girl* was an early venture by R.K.O. they had no actual "music department" for the film. The producer just hired Gus Arnheim's band to play the score because it happened that he was playing at the Coconut Grove in Los Angeles at the time. All that was done was to map out a routine for the band on the tunes—first chorus saxes, second vocal, third brass and so on—and let them play it. Then the same sound track was repeated over and over, as many as half-a-dozen times in the picture. It was used for the main title, the end title and even for the trailer. They certainly got their money's worth out of that one chorus. The elaborate scoring that is now a commonplace even in cartoon pictures was then unheard of in Hollywood.

It was during this period, at the crest of the boom years, that New York musical talent began to migrate to the coast, lured by that "twice-as-much" psychology. First all the available popular-song writers were hired to write "tunes." Then as a step higher in the aesthetic scale the producers turned to show composers. Characteristically, they got the unimportant ones first. It was not until almost the end of the first

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music cycle that Kern, Rodgers and Romberg were brought out; and, as everybody knows, Fox actually had Gershwin on their hands writing "Delicious" when that cycle stopped revolving.

Through Le Baron and Dreyfuss R.K.O. became virtually a West Coast agency for Dillingham talent. One of the first fairly well known show composers to work for the films was Harry Tierney, composer of *Irene*, *Kid Boots* and numerous other scores, who was imported to embellish his *Rio Rita*, then about to be filmed, with a few new tunes. Either by temporary or permanent standards, this was an event of practically no importance at all—save that Tierney insisted on bringing along with him his own orchestrator, by name, Max Steiner.

This was the beginning, in a word, of a dynasty. You recall perhaps the poignant background music for *The Informer*? That was Steiner. The distant dissonant trumpets in *The Lost Patrol*? Also Steiner. The undercurrent of music in *Four Daughters*? The tortured death music of *Angels with Dirty Faces*? These, and the sounds, effects and suggestive noises of a hundred other films were all by Max Steiner.

A little man who is incessantly making questionable puns, Steiner, pre-Hollywood, was the kind of a con-

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ductor that a producer of musical comedies always thought of third. He would be called in to conduct if the two conductors you had thought of first couldn't be had. An overrich orchestrator for the theater, Steiner's abilities in this field were suitable for occasional spots but not for a whole musical comedy. Since no continuous scoring was being used in Hollywood during the early days of the talkies—the formula being to devise a few motives that appeared at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the picture (surely you haven't forgotten the vogue for "theme songs" in even such dramatic films as *Seventh Heaven* ["Diane"], or *What Price Glory?* ["Charmaine"]), Steiner found himself in a milieu almost tailored to his talents.

However, Steiner's position was not established in any such simple way as this coincidence of talents and a situation suggests. He found an early opportunity for "creative" writing in preparing R.K.O. pictures for the Spanish market (both transatlantic and South American), attaining quite a reputation in the trade for this. Spanish actors were employed to speak Spanish dialogue vaguely paralleling the original texts of the pictures, but as they never utilized nearly so many words as the original script specified there re-

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maintained many *lacunae* which Steiner filled with music scored for a six-piece orchestra.

This was about 1929. That Steiner has remained in Hollywood during the years since then and prospered suggests that his talents were early recognized and established as indispensable. The truth is rather more prosaic. It chanced that shortly after this the first "music cycle" in Hollywood history came to an end, and virtually all the high-priced musicians were released at the end of their contracts, thereafter returning to New York. Steiner did not qualify for inclusion in this category, and his services were retained. Thus he had the opportunity to develop with the talkies as the attitude toward music gradually grew more tolerant.

This was slow progress and not without its digressions. The level of musical perception among Hollywood producers is, if anything, slightly lower than their perception of values associated with the other arts. Curiously, the humble artisans who are great music lovers (meaning that they will stand for six hours to hear Gigli in *Pagliacci*) never seem to be the humble artisans who become movie producers.

I recall the plight of one, whose social prestige decreed his presence at a certain Hollywood Bowl con-

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cert. It chanced that the important work of the evening was the C minor symphony of Beethoven, which he suffered in silence until the coda of the final movement. This has, as you will recall, what could be described as an 1805 Roxy finish, with the tonic and dominant chords repeated a dozen times, with flourishes. At each insistent recurrence of the tonic he half rose from his chair to facilitate his exit . . . also because he was bored. When the third series of tonic and dominant chords still left him short of the actual end of the movement he turned and muttered, "The rat fooled me again."

On this same program was a two-piano concerto by Mozart, which he dismissed with the terse comment, "It never got anywhere."

Sometime later, after a performance of Ravel's "Bolero" at the Bowl, I received a memo telling me to report the following morning at nine, because "he had an idea." This, apparently, was the one thing he heard during the whole summer that stimulated him. To enhance his position in Hollywood cultural life, he offered a musicale one night at which the invited performers were the Compinsky Trio. They were in excellent form, playing trios by Brahms, Arensky and Franck to the considerable pleasure of the guests.

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However, just as the applause of the listeners seemed about to result in an encore the host stepped forward—as if anticipating their intention—and said briskly,

“All right, boys—that’s enough.”

Perhaps his most searching bit of musical criticism was propounded when he said to me dictatorially, “In my opinion”—marking the words carefully to allow the full weight of his thought to rest on me—“the greatest piece of music ever written is ‘Humoreske.’”

It was after such a characteristic demonstration that S. N. Behrman said of this producer, “Now I know why he can make those instantaneous decisions—he is never deflected by thought.”

That Steiner was able to make any substantial headway against such resistance is a tribute almost as much to his patience as to his talents. From the making of shorts (one of which won him, in some obscure way, the small red ribbon with all the incidental prerogatives of the *Légion d’Honneur*) he progressed to more substantial accomplishments. Possibly the first general notice that was accorded his work came when the Academy Award was bestowed on *The Informer*, with an incidental citation for Steiner’s score, though his capacities were recognized in the trade before this, particularly for his work on *The Lost Patrol*.

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It was during this period of emergence that Steiner began to come into conflict with his producers as his passion for illuminating action with sound developed, and his position at the studio strengthened. He would seize upon every new script that came into the office, searching it through to find strange new uses for music. Anything with lightning and thunder or a few good horror episodes automatically became Steiner’s property. I doubt, however, that even he dreamed of so ideal a fulfillment of his hopes as he encountered in *King Kong*. This *really* got him.

It offered him a chance to write the kind of music no one had ever heard before—or since. Full of weird chords, strident background noises, rumblings and heavings, it was one of the most enthusiastically written scores ever to be composed in Hollywood. Indeed, it was always my feeling that it should have been advertised as a concert of Steiner’s music with accompanying pictures on the screen. To return to Katharine Hepburn after scoring for mountains, monsters, armies and jungles must have seemed rather piddling.

A peculiarity of Steiner’s scores is that his orchestrator must always provide a part for the harp—and a good one. This caused some difficulty in the life of Robert Russell Bennett, when he came West to orches-

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trate Jerome Kern's *I Dream Too Much*, in which Lily Pons was starred. This was altogether a confusing picture, because it was conducted by Steiner, who was also a composer, orchestrated by Bennett (whom Steiner never particularly liked to have around, as it reminded him too keenly of the days at Harms when he was the number-three orchestrator behind Bennett) and starred Pons, who insisted on having André Kostelanetz conduct her sequences.

Possibly to escape some of this concatenation of temperaments, Bennett did his orchestrating in Montana, sending in each number as it was completed. Not aware of Steiner's penchant for the harp, he omitted that instrument from the scoring of the title song, a chromatic waltz and thus not suited to the harp. Immediately there came a telegram from Steiner:

"Why no harp part?"

After puzzling over this for an hour Bennett reached a conclusion and wired back, "If there's a charming girl you want to use, put in a harp part."

The inevitable P.S. is that there was a "charming girl," who is now Steiner's wife.

It chanced that I was also working at the R.K.O. studios at the time, doing a score for Ginger Rogers' *In Person*, and I helped out on some of the technical

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details for *I Dream Too Much*. Essentially this was an outgrowth of my old hero-worship for Kern, a feeling shared by virtually all song writers. When Pons came to make her sound tracks she made several recordings of each difficult high note which was first played for her on the piano. Then they used the best note, splicing the sound tracks back and forth to achieve the perfect result you heard in the theater. It's a technique that the Metropolitan might look into.

My presence at R.K.O. was in part a consequence of the meteoric rise of Pan Berman, who, during my early Le Baron days, was a head cutter at the studio and very fresh—not in the sense that a flower is. At the time of which I'm speaking he was producing films there. Just at the end of the singer cycle Berman was contemplating the use of Pons in another film, rather more ambitious musically, but was not quite sure in his own mind whether to do so or not. In an effort to determine just how great her qualities were he would play records for me by the hour of Galli-Curci, Tetrazzini and Pons, quizzing me after each, "Who was that?"

To me, knowing nothing of any coloratura, they were all equally brilliant and equally flat. Eventually (after I had heard the "Bell Song" some eighteen or

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twenty times) I began to feel like a Cuban general endorsing a five-cent cigar.

My job on *In Person* consisted mainly of writing several songs, for which I was hired on a guarantee spread over weekly periods of payment. During an amiable lunch with Berman one day at the studio (when my work was ended, though I was still doing some advisory bits on the picture) he said, "The thing is running way over the budget. It's costing us an awful lot, and it'll be worse if I don't find some way of cutting down." He looked at me amiably and said, "You're fired."

The abruptness of this startled me, but I was even more puzzled when I thought it over subsequently, because I was getting less than anybody else on the staff.

I left Hollywood for New York before the cutting was completed and didn't get to see *In Person* until a preview just before the opening. Later that evening I met Berman for dinner, and he started by asking me how I liked the picture.

"Frankly, Pan," I said, "I was disappointed."

He rose from the table in a rage, flung down his napkin and said, "Who in hell are *you* to be disappointed?"

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The discussion of who had to be who to be disappointed took quite a long time.

Despite the vagaries of Steiner he must be credited with the establishment of certain basic principles in movie scoring, particularly through his knack of "catching things" musically. Such is the music, in his score for *Of Human Bondage*, that paralleled Philip's limp. It was almost a crippled theme, so exactly did it correspond to the hesitation in the character's walk. The secret of this derives from Steiner's painstaking study of the scenes for which he is to write music, his mathematical analysis of them in terms of "clicks."

This is a technique now used universally in writing movie music, though six years or so ago it was a novelty. By breaking down the footage of a picture into separate scenes the composer can then calculate exactly the number of seconds for so many feet of film and then write precisely that much music to cover the episode he wants to illuminate. Naturally there is the problem of dubbing the music onto the sound track so that it corresponds to incidents in the picture, but that can be done faultlessly by synchronizing the conductor's beat with the speed of the film.

In a sense this might be described as the "Mickey Mouse" technique, in which every movement of the

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character on the screen has a complementary bar of music. Steiner is particularly adept at this sort of thing, though his heavy-handed impressionism does not serve him too well in more subjective situations. He is, however, an excellent man on prison-break fogs, and also does a good job of industrial noises. Do you recall the whistles, bells, clanging of doors and other institutional sounds for *Crime School*? The hammer blows and engine noises in *Dodge City*? They were all a part of Steiner's score for these films, and enormously effective.

Up to the time he wrote the music for *Alice Adams* (which was the last close contact I had with him) Steiner's consuming passion was—for a man who had written the vast quantities of music he had—a paradoxical one. He wanted to have something published. Essentially a utilitarian composer, Steiner's work went directly from his worktable (by way of a mimeographing process) to the music stands of the orchestra, without even the dubious permanence that comes from the engraving of a plate and the solid feeling of a sheet of music in the hand. With all his composing I doubt that he ever had the ten published songs necessary to get him into A.S.C.A.P. (The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers). Naturally it was

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a great source of irritation to him, one of the busiest composers in the country, to be excluded from this society. However, symphony orchestras rarely play movie music, and the market for "agitatos" could hardly be described as ready.

Steiner's subsequent ambition is unknown to me save as it was confided in the course of the discussion, recently, of a new work he was writing—a symphony. Expostulating, and with vehemence, he declared, "It'll be either the God-damnedest hit or the biggest flop *you* ever heard." Since I had heard many performances of new symphonies, none of which fitted comfortably into either of these categories, I could only conclude that he was giving birth to something unusual indeed.

Steiner's "Mickey Mouse" technique is firmly entrenched in Hollywood, but it also has a robust opponent in another method prevailing in Hollywood, in which the composer doesn't bother to "catch" anything. This might be called the "over-all" or "mood" treatment, in which the endeavor is merely to suggest the whole atmosphere of a sequence with just a few main motives.

Thus, in a triangle picture, you have a "spiritual love" theme, the "other woman" theme, and probably a motive for "conflict." Alfred Newman is a disciple

of this school, which derives from Tschaikowsky by way of whole tones. It has always impressed me, however, that the "other woman" theme is generally more exciting, a good deal more enthusiastically written, than the one for the wife. There are constant arguments between the partisans for each method of procedure, the only agreement being that it is more difficult to write in the "Mickey Mouse" manner than in the "over-all" style. On the other hand, it can be contended that a good lush motive for a dramatic situation requires more real creative talent than the other kind of writing.

However, as the increasing prominence of music in pictures has greatly extended the number of employed composers in Hollywood, there is plentiful opportunity for writers of both types. There are now few pictures of any kind that do not utilize music to some degree, and in a considerable majority of them the score is credited to a musician of specialized, if not general reputation. Offhand, in the last year, I have seen films from Hollywood with scores attributed to Richard Hageman, Louis Gruenberg, Ernst Toch, Kurt Weill, W. Franke Harling, George Antheil, Erich Korngold and Werner Janssen, all composers of general reputation; as well as others by such specialists

as Steiner, Newman, Stothart, Franz Waxman, Edward Ward, Hugo Friedhofer and Edward Powell, to mention only the more familiar names. Indeed, the methods of mass production have in few other connections been utilized with the skill with which they are applied to the writing of movie scores in Hollywood.

I had an unenviable opportunity to come closely into contact with those methods several years ago during one of my more recent Hollywood intervals. I had tired of living on the periphery of asceticism while studying with Schönberg and sought employment with a movie company, convinced that I could copy as capably from Debussy and Delius as anyone then active in the films.

Through the intercession of friends I was provided with an introduction to an official at M.G.M., whom I had also met on previous occasions at various parties. At one of these, impressed by some fugitive manifestation of talent, he said, "Come to see me. I want to do something for you."

It was after this that I came with the introduction. He looked at me with evident disinterest while he listened to a recitation of my background. Then he shook my hand encouragingly and said,

"Yes. Come back again in two months."

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Just what I was supposed to do in this interim was not made clear. But while I awaited the expiration of this interlocutory decree of divorce from my unemployment my friends continued the program of propaganda on my behalf. Finally I was granted a second interview and again rehearsed my qualifications. My prospective employer (so I visualized him) listened with impolite inattentiveness, continuously saying, "Yes? Yes?"

Finally he turned and said, "I'll have to refer you to our music director, Nat Finston."

I had had some dealings with Finston at the Rivoli Theater in New York years before when he was a conductor there. I found him in a commodious office, hung with charts which were his most absorbing possession. Within a few minutes he had led me to the wall (which they covered completely) and begun to explain their significance. Each chart represented a film, and each bore the name of a composer who had been assigned to write the score for it. There was one for Stothart, another for Ward, a third for Waxman and so on. As Commissar of Music for the M.G.M. enterprises, Finston was as closely in touch with the activities of his vassals as the tovarich in charge of a salt mine in the Ukraine.

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He then launched into a long exposition of his career at the studio, detailing the chaos in which he found the music department and the perfection of organization that now prevailed.

"I tell you," he said, "it's running like a well-oiled machine."

The phrase appealed to him, and he repeated,

"Like a well-oiled machine. Every man a cog in the wheel."

Then he looked at me severely—running his hands through his thick hair as he did and pacing the room with supervisory strides—and said, "I don't know whether or not you would fit in."

"Mr Finston," I answered, "my greatest desire in life at this moment is to be a cog in the wheel. If I don't qualify it will be because my music is inferior, not because I don't want to be a cog in the wheel."

In response he suggested that I bring in a few scores for him to see.

I came back the next day with my scores, and before I was aware of what was happening we were again busy with the well-oiled machine and how important it was to be a cog in the wheel. The exposition was even more detailed than that of the previous day, though no new territory was explored. The purely

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scientific pleasure that Finston derived from his creation obviously excluded any interruptions from me. At the end of his discourse he shook his head, implying doubt, and said, "I don't think you'd fit into this well-oiled machine." Then he added as a kind of consolation award, "But any time you want call me up, and we'll have a chat."

It was not until I was outside that I realized that my scores were in the same package in which I had brought them, that Finston had never looked at them.

Two days later I rang up M.G.M. and asked to be connected with Mr Finston. At length I got through to him, and he said brusquely,

"I'm busy. What's on your mind?"

"Nothing," I said. "I just would like to have a chat."

Annoyed but still not quite knowing whether he should show it or not, Finston exclaimed, "Some other time. Not now."

This, in an anecdote, was the history of my career as a composer with M.G.M.

At an opposite, but not much more inviting pole, was my experience with Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur when they were producing pictures in the East. Specifically, it was during the making of *Crime without Passion*, for which I wrote some of the music—

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only the brittle, disillusioned parts, not the big tuttis. These were done by Frank Tours, music director of the picture. My association with Hecht arose from the fact that I was at liberty, and he played the violin very badly. As hardly more than a gag, he offered me \$15 to play duets with him once a week. I accepted and found myself becoming engrossed in his producing activities.

Since Tours was so busy he gave me several sequences to write, and I became very much immersed in the film, going to the studio daily. Since I was living at a mid-town hotel, and the studio was in Astoria, my cab fares found me losing about eight dollars a week on the fifteen. Hecht, satirizing Hollywood studios, gave everyone important titles. The office boys were all members of the board of directors, the porter was Supervisor in Charge of Sanitation, and I, the only other person in the music department beside Tours, was installed as Assistant President of the Music Department.

Despite the burden of this honor I found it necessary to go to Hecht one day and point out that I was losing money on the job. With a generous gesture he nominally doubled my salary each week, though my pay check still called for only \$15. It seemed that the

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checks had to go through five banks and the hands of ten suspicious people who were backing him.

Nevertheless this did not alleviate my situation, and to placate me, Hecht kept sending a steady stream of memos announcing increases in my wage. One day I was drawing \$350 a week. An hour later I received a memo announcing that I had been raised to \$500. By the end of the week my salary had mounted to \$1200, but there still was only \$15 in my pay envelope. There then ensued a series of weekly raises, to a rhythm of \$500 a week. Before long I was in the hysterical brackets, but still only drawing my \$15.

Finally I went to his office one day and said,

"I can't afford any more of these raises. I'm starving to death as it is."

Whether one would consider this an experience as a cog in a machine, well-oiled or otherwise, is at least debatable. However, I had such an opportunity a little later when, through the intercession of Irving Berlin, I was tapped for membership at Twentieth Century-Fox. But again I was frustrated. Since I had been hired as a composer through an executive channel I had little contact with the actual music department, which was supervised by Lou Silvers. He avoided giving me any assignment to work under him, being—as he remarked

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to one of his associates—afraid of my jokes. All during the time I was employed there Silvers lived in fear that I might make him the object of a wisecrack.

The presiding genius of Twentieth Century-Fox is, of course, Darryl Zanuck, who might be described as a man who knows, unfortunately, what he wants. From the tradition of ignorance of all music that had prevailed during the early years of sound films, there had grown up another belief, which held that a producer should know a little about everything that went into a picture—history, grammar, costume, design, dramaturgy, even music. This opens an endless vista of prediction. In such a picture as *Under Two Flags*—which was not a mere epic but a super-spectacle—Zanuck decreed that the musical score should include, as its basic elementals, Cui's "Orientale" and the "Chanson Arabe" from Tschaikowsky's "Nutcracker" suite. This he referred to as "something they could whistle." (I never did find out who was meant by "they.")

It was this type of erudition that was displayed by another producer (not Zanuck) who was in charge of a picture with a Parisian background. He came to an audition of one extended bit of music that was designed to accompany the main character on a stroll along a boulevard in Paris (the high point of the film,

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musically). He gave his best critical attention to the playing of the orchestra, and when it was finished, pausing reflectively, he said, "Not bad. Not bad. But it's not Frenchy enough."

Suddenly he roused himself from his deep thought, snapped his fingers and said,

"I've got it! Put in a few more French horns."

As a digression I might mention that Zanuck was a man with a somewhat sadistic sense of humor. His particular penchant was for satirical practical jokes. While *Lloyds of London* was in the discussion state he conceived a *jeu d'esprit* that took account of the fancy which inhabited the soul of the late Sam Pokrass, composer, that he was a gifted gag man. This delusion was somewhat complicated by the difficulty that impeded the Russian-born Pokrass' use of the English language. He reminded me of the prize-fight manager of whom Dan Parker, savant of the *Daily Mirror* said, "His mother tongue is broken English."

He called in Pokrass and outlined the story to him, explaining that it was a project for the Ritz Brothers, and indicating that it needed a bit of sprucing up with gags and comedy situations. Poor Pokrass spent two weeks trying to brighten up the script of *Lloyds of London* with gags for the Ritz Brothers before word

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seeped through to him that the stars of it were Tyrone Power, Virginia Field and Robert Sanders!

With Twentieth Century-Fox, one of my early undertakings was to write an operatic sequence for *Charlie Chan at the Opera* (not, however, *Le Crayon sur la table*). This was due to my friendship with John Stone, who was in charge of the production. Since this was a B film there were certain problems to be met, especially those of the budget. Twentieth Century-Fox had just completed an elaborate spectacle with Lawrence Tibbett, of which one of the high spots was a *Faust* scene in which the star wore a magnificent Mephistophelian costume.

One of our first problems arose when the costume was assigned to *Charlie Chan at the Opera*, with instructions for us to put it to work. I had heard of music being written around a singer, but never for a costume. Nevertheless, determined to become a cog in the wheel, I set myself to writing an operatic sequence in which the big aria found a baritone wearing this elegant Mephistopheles costume. As an additional slight detail it was necessary for the aria to work up to a point at which the singer stabbed the girl with a lethal knife malevolently substituted for the prop one. This was the whole point of the picture.

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Since we had no libretto I wrote the music first, and then the words were written for it by Bill Kernell, a lyricist who also wrote songs. He was assigned to the job because it was thought that he would have more musical understanding than the ordinary hack writer. I never did find out the meaning of the silly English words he wrote for the music, because as soon as he was finished studio linguists were called in to translate the whole thing into Italian.

In addition to this baritone aria (which came out as a potent mingling of Moussorgsky and pure Levant) I also wrote a soprano scene, rather lyrical and expressive, also a rhythmic little march for some soldiers that we introduced into the episode. (The lead role, that of the baritone, was played by Boris Karloff, though the voice was dubbed, of course.) My only specification in writing the score was that at some point I should be able to use the word "silencio," which always appealed to me. They compromised by letting me begin one aria with "Silencio!"

Having had little experience in writing opera, I asked Schönberg for some advice. He advised me to study the score of Beethoven's *Fidelio*. Since this is one of the most unoperatic of all operas it was just what I didn't need.

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In the idiom I used there were a few turns of phrase which I considered individual, also a harmonic idiom a little more adventurous than that commonly encountered in such writing. It was acceptable to the producers (they liked the soprano aria particularly because it had a good tune) but I encountered some difficulty with the orchestral players. I was especially irritated with one of the violinists, who took exception to the way I had written a certain phrase, saying, "My finger doesn't want to go there."

Among the musicians with whom I came in contact was Herbert Spencer, a remarkable orchestrator, who is greatly admired by his co-workers, including me. He was known especially as a "sound" man. All the orchestrators came to him when they had difficulties, to make sure that a certain texture of orchestration would "sound" when it was played.

Spencer was, by some curiosity, a Chilean—and even more remarkably—a blond Chilean. He was sent by his parents to study engineering at the University of Pennsylvania but digressed into playing the saxophone. From this he went on to play with Vincent Lopez and to arrange for him. He studied for a time with Florida, who was among other distinctions the teacher of Nat Shilkret—of whom I'll dispose with just the men-

tion of his name. After this, Spencer spent a few mathematical afternoons with Joseph Schillinger. Then he passed into radio work, doing the Burns and Allen show for Bobby Dolan. When the comedians went to Hollywood to work, Spencer came along to do their orchestrating. At length, by these devious paths, he went into pictures, acquiring a considerable reputation as a specialist. One of his best jobs was the orchestration of Irving Berlin's "On the Avenue."

The other well-respected orchestrators in Hollywood were hardly less eclectic in background. Edward Powell was brought out by Alfred Newman, who plucked him from the Harms-Chappell training school, where he had done among other jobs the orchestration of Gershwin's *Let 'Em Eat Cake*. Carroll Huxley, one of the best arrangers for Kostelanetz and Whiteman, was drawn from radio. For some obscure reason he was assigned to score for Westerns, which did no good either for Huxley or for the Westerns. His career in pictures was not very lengthy. Robert Russell Bennett, of course, had perhaps the most conspicuous reputation as an orchestrator for the Broadway theater of any man in America, having done splendid work in such shows as *Show Boat* and *The Band Wagon*. He never particularly relished working in

Hollywood, going there principally out of friendship for Kern, with whom he has worked for many years.

I speak of these boys particularly because they share a common background of training on Broadway and almost all of them were Harms alumni. There were other fine orchestrators in Hollywood, one among them being Ray Heindorf at Warner Brothers. He was noted especially for his work on musical pictures, being a wonderful hand at orchestrating song choruses, dance routines and similar work.

Much of the fine work these men do is conditioned by the characteristics of sound-track recording. I don't know whether their work would come off nearly so well without a microphone. (This does not apply at all to Bennett, who is much more flexible.) A clarinet against six brass is all right if the clarinet can walk up to the microphone and play his solo there. It is another problem to score for the concert hall, where such an effect would be lost completely.

While at Twentieth Century-Fox I also came into contact with the remarkable custom (considering the species of human that inhabited the music department) of tea with the usual "trumpets" each afternoon at five. Everybody in the music department had to contribute a certain sum each week for the Tea Fund.

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There was also a communal approach to other problems, notably the one of keeping abreast of developments elsewhere in the musical world. The boys obtained every important new score as soon as it was available, with the result that Hindemith's "Mathis der Maler" was known in Hollywood before it was played in Carnegie Hall. They frequently had meetings at each other's houses, where they would play records, break down the instrumentation of certain passages, discuss the technique of the writing and make notes on the effects that were introduced in the scores.

The effect of this was not invisible in their own scores. It was with more than a slight feeling of surprise that I listened to the pattern of Ravel's "La Valse" as the background to a brilliant treatment of a Cole Porter song in *Rosalie*. For Spanish things the treatment is generally influenced by Debussy's "Iberia" or the Arbós orchestration of Albeniz's "Triana." After a time the boys got hold of a few Villa-Lobos records. They did all right with those, too. The Spanish port of call in Ibert's "Escalaes" has not been overlooked, either.

Two types of orchestration have come into such general use in Hollywood that I began the custom of referring to them as "generic" or "derivative." "Generic" is something that sounds like something else.

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"Derivative," however, is a term of stronger censure implying that you have lifted the whole texture from some not-too-familiar source.

I should mention that Delius was discovered in Hollywood about three years ago. It immediately became the standard thing for walks in the garden, bicycle rides or the English downs at dawn. Another orchestrator, David Raksin, was affected in a far-reaching way by the scherzo of the Shostakovitch first symphony.

Raksin was one of my favorite Hollywood musicians. We went frequently to the Bowl together, where he would tell me that the tuba bothered him, acoustically—even though we sat a full mile from the stage. His secret ambition was to be a ballet dancer, and he also wrote papers on acoustics for scientific magazines. He, too, was originally a saxophonist, thereafter playing and arranging for Al Goodman before passing into the Chappell net.

Raksin came to Hollywood primarily to take down Chaplin's whistling of his own score for *Modern Times*. Since the whistling method of composing is a rather tenuous thing, and in any case Chaplin's whistling is at best pretty derivative, the difficulties of such a collaboration may be imagined. It was arduous

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enough for Raksin to sit all day waiting for Chaplin to whistle, without the further complications of that artist's temperament. The inevitable thing happened, but Newman patched up the argument, and Raksin went back to taking down Chaplin's whistling. I never could understand how one might whistle harmony and counterpoint as well as a tune. Under any circumstances it seems a complicated approach to composition. However, together with his great gifts in other directions, Chaplin combines a facility in this direction.

Newman—who is the best conductor by far in Hollywood—had a tremendous argument with Chaplin over the directing of the score of *Modern Times*. Being independent as well as able, Newman walked out on the job, and Eddie Powell was called in to direct the last reel. Apparently Newman found that the whistling type of composer is more trying by far than Stravinsky and Schönberg together.

At Twentieth Century-Fox, Louis Silvers was in charge of the musical affairs. He did no composing himself, confining himself to conducting and supervising. Somewhat disturbed by the newer trends in movie music, he fortified himself by securing the services of the fine Austrian modernist, Ernst Toch. Silvers never actually utilized his talents to write a

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film but kept him as a kind of Toch in the hole, in case Steiner or Newman put over something revolutionary in one of their pictures.

Toch had had some experience as a composer for the films both in England and America. Abroad, he had composed the score for *Little Friend* (with Nova Pilbeam) but the experience did not please him too much. It was his contention that the producers had used only the lower part of his orchestration, omitting everything in the upper staves. In Hollywood, his experience was principally concerned with a film version of *Peter Ibbetson* at Paramount. However, his score was considerably "touched up" by Hugo Friedhofer in order to make it serviceable for the film within the allotted time and to conform to the technical means at hand. Friedhofer subsequently embarked on a course of study with Toch and became one of his best pupils.

There is rarely a period in Hollywood when all the orchestrators and most of the movie composers are not studying with one or another of the prominent musicians who have gone there to live recently. At one time the vogue was for Schönberg, who came with a great reputation, of course, as a teacher. However, most of the boys wanted to take a six weeks' course and learn a handful of Schönberg tricks. They were

sorely disappointed when they discovered that it was his intention to give them instruction in counterpoint, harmony and chorale, which meant that they would have to expend considerable effort themselves in doing assigned work.

One especially naïve young man took one of his problems to Schönberg, hopeful of a quick, concise solution. He had been assigned to write some music for an airplane sequence and was not sure how he should go about it. He posed the problem to Schönberg, who thought for a moment and then said,

"Airplane music? Just like music for big bees, only louder."

He afterwards always referred to this kind of music as "big bee" music.

When Schönberg arrived in California it was the desire of his friends to see him employed in the movies and well paid for it. He was invited to an important première, following which the producer intercepted him and asked what he thought of the score. Schönberg replied that he hadn't noticed it, thus bearing out the average producer's theory of what constitutes a good score, only in reverse.

Nevertheless, his friends continued the propaganda, one of the most active among them being Salka Vier-

tel. She knew that Thalberg had *Good Earth* in preparation and subtly implanted the idea in his mind of utilizing Schönberg to write the score. He was singularly unimpressed with her tales of his eminence until she chanced to mention that there was a considerable article about Schönberg in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. When he had confirmed the information his interest in Schönberg immediately became acute.

It chanced then that the Columbia Broadcasting System was presenting a broadcast in Schönberg's honor, of which a principal work was his early "Verklärte Nacht." Its romantic flavor and poetic character deeply impressed Thalberg, who thereafter sent an emissary to see Schönberg, even though the music he might write now would have no possible resemblance to "Verklärte Nacht." The emissary found the composer indifferent to the idea and thereupon launched into a long recitation of the possibilities for music in the film, leading up to a dramatic exposition of its "big scene."

"Think of it!" he enthused. "There's a terrific storm going on, the wheat field is swaying in the wind, and suddenly the earth begins to tremble. In the midst of the earthquake Oo-Lan gives birth to a baby. What an opportunity for music!"

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"With so much going on," said Schönberg mildly, "what do you need music for?"

Some time after my Twentieth Century-Fox experiences I established a contact with David Selznick, who also knew—more or less—what he wanted. This also permitted a sentimental reunion with Ben Hecht, for my assignment was to his amusing *Nothing Sacred*, with Fredric March and Carole Lombard.

If I appeared at the studio with anything even faintly modern Selznick's invariable comment was,

"It sounds Chinese."

On the other hand, if I produced something that was not obviously melodic, but well written for the orchestra, his reaction was,

"You're not writing for the Bowl. You're writing for fifty million people."

To him, the Bowl represented the pinnacle of everything that was erudite in music—a combination of the Paris Conservatoire, Carnegie Hall and the Mozarteum in Salzburg, occupying an empty space on a hillside. It was a place you went to if you wanted to assure yourself of a dull evening. Despite this he has a very creative part in supervising the music used in his pictures.

Personally, however, I always enjoyed amiable re-

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lations with Selznick. He had a weakness for me, perhaps because I came from Pittsburgh, where he originated, and also because his brother Myron had a fondness for me. Through me Selznick was enabled to become a fractional patron of the arts. He became interested in my activities as a composer, and even after my work at the studio was completed I continued to have a modest drawing account so that I could continue with my serious work. In return I eventually gave him some musical material for *Made for Each Other*, in which Carole Lombard and James Stewart appeared.

Before this, however, I had left Hollywood to come East, without knowing just what Selznick would want of me. He wrote to say that I should just collect some themes so that they would be available when he needed them. I responded in a letter that this was rather a confusing assignment, leaving a good deal of latitude for both of us. In return Selznick wrote that if my music came up to the level of my letter he would be thoroughly satisfied.

There are few men in Hollywood so completely devoted to their pictures as Selznick. He represents the second generation of a Hollywood Royal Family and takes tremendous pride in his work. Nothing he pro-

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duces costs less than two million dollars, for he feels that it would not otherwise be worthy of the Selznick traditions. It is rumored, indeed, that he left M.G.M. to establish his own firm so that the name of Selznick would be perpetuated in pictures.

I have referred at various points in this chapter to composers and orchestrators as separate individuals, which might be slightly confusing to the uninitiated. This is only appropriate, however, as there are few things more confusing than the means by which a score is created in Hollywood, even to the initiated. Few composers, for example, do their own orchestration. The scattered exceptions are the orchestrators who become composers. The distinction is that a composer like Steiner or Newman or Stothart will lay out the orchestration and sketch the effects that he has in mind. Thereafter his orchestrator will do the work of actually working out the instrumentation, of filling in the background texture. In some instances a composer will just give the themes to the orchestrator and let him play around with them according to a predesignated outline.

The business of orchestrating has become so specialized that a good orchestrator, if he is rushed with several jobs, will give out the orchestration to other

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orchestrators, unbeknown to the composer. The orchestrators are paid by the page, about \$5.00 (no page contains more than four bars, by union specifications). This is the minimum rate, and if a well-known orchestrator is paid a premium for his services he can farm out some of his work to a less expensive man and still make a profit on the deal. De luxe orchestrators, such as Robert Russell Bennett, are hired for a specific job against a guarantee. If the amount of orchestration exceeds a specified number of pages they are paid *pro rata* for the excess pages.

The composers, on the other hand, are paid (for the run-of-the-mine jobs) by the minute in most studios. The number of minutes of music used—generally specified in advance—determines the payment the composer receives for his job. A reasonable figure for this type of work would be about \$200 a minute. It is apparent that this is excellent pay for slow, sustained music. (I never could get away with much of that slow-chord stuff.) However, if you are required to write a few scherzos, or battle music that goes very fast or a score for a chase, it doesn't work out so well.

Sometimes after a distinguished career an orchestrator will be promoted to the status of a composer. Eddie Powell and Hugo Friedhofer, for example,

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wrote a film together for Hal Roach. In such circumstances, naturally, the orchestrators will do their own orchestration. As I have pointed out, Max Steiner began his career in Hollywood as an orchestrator, rising later to his more exalted status.

Much of this division of labor arises from the circumstances that govern the production of the average picture. The element of time is perhaps the most important of all. For, it must be understood, no score for a Hollywood picture is written until the movie is virtually completed. It is not until the film is cut and assembled that the composer knows where the best opportunities will be for his music and how to plan the effects that will best enhance the film. Since a comparatively short time elapses between the completion of the average film and its release the composer has to work expeditiously. Thus the composer hardly has time for his own orchestrating, even if he knows how; and furthermore, no important composer—Steiner, Newman, Stothart—would consider it worth his while to bother orchestrating when some specialist can do it as well or better for a stipulated sum.

Of course, once the composer has been assigned to a picture he might look in on it during production or even read the script, thereafter collecting themes or

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motives to be whipped into shape when the time for his writing arrives. Some composers prefer to work this way, while others do very little until they see the film in the projection room, going on from there.

In the first class, I think particularly of Erich Wolfgang—for Mozart—Korngold. This was exemplified during the production of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, for which he had been hired to reorchestrate Mendelssohn's score and add some new material. As he entered the studio yard one day on the way to his office a car drove up and James Cagney, who played Bottom in the film, stepped out. It chanced that Cagney and Korngold had not met previously, and the flunkey who was guiding Korngold about thought this would be a favorable opportunity to bring the two together.

Korngold had no sooner been presented to Cagney than he stepped back and said, "Hold still, Mr Cagney. Hold still a minute."

Then he rubbed his chin reflectively and began to hum a little. Walking around to the other side, he continued the inspection and the humming, meanwhile whistling contentedly under his breath. Finally, when the image of Cagney had been securely captured in musical terms, he thanked his subject and departed.

Cagney said he almost felt as if he should ask when

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to come in and try on the theme for which Korngold had fitted him.

Whatever method a composer uses, however, he soon discovers that there are basic verities in Hollywood's use of music that he has to respect. Except in the rarest instances (so rare that I can hardly think of one off-hand) the music that is written for movies in Hollywood is channeled into certain well-defined categories—those that I mentioned at the outset of this chapter. There are “main titles” and “end titles,” “montages” and “inserts”—and practically nothing else except background noises and atmospheric effects.

“Main titles” is Hollywood jargon for everything that happens before the movie actually starts—that is, the music that accompanies the “cards” or “titles” which announce the name of the picture, the credits for direction, action, script, lighting, sound and costumes. In musical films the problem is easily solved by merely scoring the important song for a heavy orchestra and playing it over several times.

However, for dramatic films the undertaking is rather more complex, for there has grown up a tradition of a big “sweep” for the opening. This is supposed to give an aura of impressiveness to the beginning of the film, even if you have already sat through half the

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picture and decided that it's lousy. “Sweep,” in musical terms, implies a harp glissando, ascending-scale passages for the violins—*ff*—as well as for the woodwinds, all topped by a cymbal crash on the first beat, after which, grandiose *tuttis*. Steiner's “Mickey Mouse” technique prompts him to write different music for each of the separate credit “cards.” Newman, on the other hand, works for the mood of the whole picture, substantially disregarding the changes.

On the other hand, “montages” occur in the middle of the picture, generally in what I would describe as a “Vorkapich mood” (in tribute to Slavko Vorkapich, the technician who introduced this technique to Hollywood). These are the mixed-up sequences in which a variety of different scenes are flashed on the screen, sometimes superimposed on each other, to cover a lapse of time by allusions to incidents not described in the script. A favorite subject for the “Vorkapich mood” is honeymoons, in which a boat is seen pulling out of New York harbor, then there is a shot of the Savoy in London, the Champs Elysées in Paris, the pigeons at St Peter's in Rome and finally the Statue of Liberty. In this way the Will Hays office is appeased, and the audience is given to understand that a marriage has been consummated.

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For some reason, the Paris music—with the boulevard in the background, the trees, Parisians sitting at café tables—is always based on the walking music from Gershwin's "American in Paris." This has become the standard thing, and any deviation from it is looked upon with disdain by the producers. To a certain extent this is understandable. However, when the couple comes back to New York and the cab drives up Broadway—*again* it is the "American in Paris," with the same snappy one-step, the taxi horns and the hustle bustle. On sunny days London is similarly depicted, but this is a rarity in the films, where the Strand is permanently enveloped in fog.

One of the most remarkable montages I ever saw was in a picture with Jeanette MacDonald, in which she played the part of a prima donna. The purpose of this montage was to bridge over her transition from obscurity to world celebrity, and it was done by a series of superimposed opera bills, showing MacDonald singing at Monte Carlo, Paris, Berlin, Budapest, Covent Garden and finally, of course, at the Metropolitan. The astonishing thing about this montage was that the musical background contained themes from *Tristan* and *Aida*, *Traviata* and *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and *Don Giovanni*—suggesting

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that MacDonald could sing anything from Isolde to Violetta, from Rosina to Donna Anna. Even in the movies that is considerable territory.

Then there are "inserts," which are usually concerned with newspaper headlines announcing that District Attorney Huey is going to prosecute "Big Nose" Salvatore, leader of the dope ring in Steeltown. It has become established that frenetic Rimsky-Korsakoff trumpets, playing repeated seconds, are the precise thing for inserts of this sort. On the other hand, in mass processional scenes of the *Little Caesar* era, when a newspaper came hurtling out of the corner of the screen and you dimly saw an expensive funeral making its way down the street, you were certain to hear one of two things—either the "Dead March" from "Saul" (Handel) or the Funeral March from Chopin's B minor sonata. Warner's, I believe, was more partial to Chopin, while Fox and Universal went in more for the classic Handel.

In addition to these several specific categories (which permit of few variations) there are several species of fog music which deserve a word of attention. Ordinary fogs, such as those which hang over the English downs or the harbor at Calais, are invariably Ravel-Debussy, with the element of the latter derived

from his "Fêtes" (the muted trumpets). However, special kinds of fogs, for prison breaks or bank robberies, require a certain admixture of horror. A few of the recondite figurations from Dukas's "L'Apprenti Sorcier" will satisfy this requirement very successfully.

I directed attention earlier to the specialized influence of music by Frederick Delius. As well as supplying backgrounds for walks in the garden, his music has proved exceptionally useful for the bicycle rides in the country that the daughter of the prime minister (English) takes with the leader of the Black and Tans (Irish) in Sinn Fein pictures, before she discovers that he is one of "those" people.

For some reason there is a tradition of train music in movies that has produced few examples of less than brilliant quality. Perhaps the accessibility of Honegger's "Pacific 231"—which settled this problem once and for all—has something to do with it. However, as early as the "Blue Horizon" number from *Monte Carlo* (the Lubitsch film with MacDonald and Jack Buchanan) there was a distinguished train episode. One of the best suggestive sequences of this sort was done by Stothart for the suicide scene in *Anna Karenina* with Garbo.

If there is a problem of anything roguish or slightly

unconventional in humor the bassoon will take care of it. If Richard Strauss has not collected any movie royalties for his "Till Eulenspiegel," it is not because his music has not been used in the films but merely because it has been signed by a variety of different names. It is, in fact, wearing a bit thin now, suggesting either that Strauss will have to write a new tone poem in the same vein or else the boys will have to find something else to be "generic" with.

The orchestral pattern of all carousels, incidentally, is derived from Stravinsky's "Petrouchka."

Speaking of Strauss brings to mind another type of musical film, in which two of the bit players are always the Emperor Franz Josef and Johann Strauss. My guess is that Franz Josef must have had a family of at least 2,000, for in each of these films he is in love with a different chorus girl or ballerina. As for the Strausses, senior and junior, they have quarreled and patched up more times even than James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan. This has been going on for years with only one predictable result—the picture is never a success.

It is these things that I had in mind at the outset of this chapter when I said that little attention is paid to the character of a score as a whole in Hollywood.

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Obviously it is impossible for a composer to assert his individuality when everything he writes must fit into a predetermined space, when he is aware that there must be no nonsense of allowing an idea to develop.

I recognize that the limitations I have referred to from time to time are in the main due to the exigencies of the way pictures are produced. But such details as the lush orchestration, the constant use of musical clichés, the undeviating devotion to formulas are not to be excused on this basis.

It is a rather significant thing, I think, that no well-known American composer has ever been granted an opportunity by a Hollywood producer actually to assimilate the technique of writing for the films. If by some circumstance he is engaged for such a job—as, say, Hageman and Gruenberg have—he soon becomes aware that the requirements of the movies are quite different from those with which he is accustomed to work. The usual procedure is to make use of the material he writes—for the prestige value of his name—extensively reorganized by a specialist, usually an orchestrator. Then he is paid off, with no further chance to increase his experience or make use of what he has learned.

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For it must be apparent by now that the large majority of scores used in Hollywood is written by specialists, and that there is pretty much of a closed shop for the specialists. All this results in a vicious circle in which the talented men do not have the experience, and the experienced men—largely speaking—have no particular talent. Thus the same clichés are repeated over and over in the same lush tradition of over-orchestrating.

It has always seemed a paradoxical thing to me that movie orchestration is practically the only movie activity in which there has been no retrenchment during the depression. There is still the conviction in Hollywood that a bloated tutti, with horns, trombones and cellos playing a melodic phrase, is the quickest way to the heart of the audience. No violins ever play in unison—only in sixths and thirds. Each episode, no matter what the implications of the scene, must be lined with orchestral gold and silver, with the horn figures inside, the clarinets and flutes on top, the ground swell of cellos and basses underneath.

I recall a Russian picture with a score by Shostakovich which began with a single piccolo playing faintly in a high register. Then another woodwind entered, and the two voices were developed contra-

puntally. This had ten times the personality of *all* the "main-title" music produced in Hollywood last year, with all its big "sweep." If a composer in Hollywood appeared at a studio with an opening sequence scored for one, three or five instruments the producer would think that he was not getting a proper return for his investment.

Nevertheless, Arthur Honegger wrote a fine movie score for the English *Pygmalion*, in which there was much writing for single instruments and, frequently, a lean, precise, economic kind of orchestration. He also achieved an excellent effect in his score for *Mayerling* with a small orchestra. Nor is this by any means a recent development in European writing for the movies. At least ten years ago Georges Auric wrote one of the best movie scores of all time for René Clair's *A Nous la Liberté*. It was witty without being self-conscious, fresh without being eccentric, terse without being sparse—and all done with a small orchestra.

As for Shostakovitch and Prokofieff, they have both done distinguished work for the films. Of the former I have already spoken. Prokofieff's entertaining score for *The Czar Sleeps* was good enough to be separated from its scenario and converted into a concert suite

which has been played extensively by Koussevitzky and others as "Lieutenant Kije." I should not be surprised if there should be a similar development in the instance of his score for *Alexander Nevsky* (first heard in America with the film a year ago) which reveals a new aspect of Prokofieff's talent in its suggestions of Moussorgsky and Borodin. It is certainly unthinkable that an American composer should be allowed to reveal anything significant about himself, new or old, in a score he would write for Hollywood.

It is hardly believable that in so short a time the producers and their categories of writing for the screen should have become so firmly entrenched. However, this is precisely what makes the outlook so black. The patterns have been established by men who have no particular originality, and they must be respected by everyone who comes to Hollywood, regardless of what talents they may possess. Despite the vast quantities of music that are written in Hollywood each year, none of it is ever heard in the concert halls. On the other hand the men whose music is played in the concert hall rarely write for Hollywood.

Among persons of musical discrimination the only scores for American films that are spoken of with enthusiasm were written without exception for non-

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commercial films. I think particularly of Virgil Thomson's scores for *The Plow That Broke the Plains* and *The River*, both produced by the government. In the latter Thomson used mostly folk songs, and even a banjo. It was scored for a small group of musicians from the Philharmonic conducted by Alexander Smallens. I don't know whether Thomson was required by a budget to use a small orchestra; but I do know that it placed a premium on ingenuity, of which he has no lack.

Aaron Copland also did a distinguished job recently for *The City*, a film produced by the New York Housing Commission. It had point, atmosphere and appositeness—all without sacrificing musical quality. One of the most enjoyable musical experiences I have had was in directing the recording of the score written by the German Hanns Eisler for an animated film exhibited at the New York World's Fair. Not only was there pleasure in the brightness and clarity of his ideas, there was also distinction in the clean precision of his orchestration, the polish and finesse of his writing.

Of course, these men did not draw pay checks in five figures for their services. But, on the other hand, they did not have to run a gauntlet of producers, supervisors and "musical directors."

My Life