

BACKGROUND MUSIC

by MUIR MATHIESON Famous Musical Director for over 200 British Pictures

Heart! (Alan Rawthorne), "The Last Walk" (from "The Edge of the World" (W. L. Williamson), "The Vision of Leonardo" and "Gliding" from "Cohquest of the Air" (Arthur Bliss), and a number of other film items.

During the last few years I have had the interesting duty of introducing many of our leading composers to the film studio. They have not only shown an intense interest in the new medium, but an immediate grasp of its technical and dramatic demands. Thus into British films has gone a wealth of great music, truly representative of our time and its linking of the past and tradition.

Mr. and Mrs. Muir Mathieson at the Prague Film Festival, 1946

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FILM Music is the youngest, and probably the most vigorous, offspring of one of the oldest Arts. This means that it deserves the attention and interest it is now beginning to receive from the musical organisations and the public of this and other countries. Film Music, having availed itself of every type of music, every type from symphony to swing, must now be broken up into two main divisions. Firstly, there is the standard music which is merely recorded and used "in" a film. Secondly, there is the music specially commissioned and written "for" a film. It is the latter type which I have usually been interested in during the period in which a film receives its musical background. Here it is important to get the right composer for each type of picture.

Film music was just beginning to develop at the end of the silent days; special scores were being sent round with each film instead of just relying on the ingenuity of the local cinema pianist or musical director, as had been the case up to that time. Then came the talkies and the theme song, and with them the inglorious period of music merely used "in" films. After about five years, however, music "in" films again emerged and began to progress. With Arthur Bliss' "Things To Come" in 1935, film music established itself in its own right.

Since then a great deal has been done in this country by producers, directors and musicians to explore the full possibilities of music in relation to the film. Even to-day we are only at the beginning. For one thing, we lack experienced composers and criticism in the national press. Many film music has never anybody's baby? I imagine the difficulty is that the film critic is not supposed to criticise music and, in the same way, the music critic must ignore films. This is not a great pity, as so much contemporary music and dramatic thought is being expended in this direction. The public likewise has little idea of what background music is supposed to do. Indeed, the present method of film-ming does not permit of anything better now, pictures are designed to be seen only once, and on one viewing the music cannot be expected to emerge as a conscious element of the entertainment. "When you go to the cinema," says the French composer Maurice Jaubert, "it is not to hear music, we require it to deepen and prolong in us the screen's visual impressions." Not being a composer, I can only imagine how depressing this must be for the musician! Yet, for all that, we in this country have made a practise of getting the finest contemporary composers to write music for the screen. Why?

It is in the matter of teamwork. If the photography is good, the sound recording is good, the film editing is good, you will not be aware of any of these items as such when seeing a film, but you will come away saying that it was a first-class production. By the same theory applies to the music; if it is good, you will not be aware of it, even (and this hard fact must be faced by all film music people) if the audience as a whole were not aware of the power and impact of the score.

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Exclusive interview with our American Representative
ROBERT REYNOLDS

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The personnel is a constantly shifting one. The original "key men" who started with the band (Stevie McKay, tenor; Frank Di Marino, first trumpet; Doc Clifford, ex-Goodman (the many) are still rehearsing weekly. Other artists include Sandy Williams, trombone; Cecil Scott, tenor; the great Powe Irwin, trumpet; Harry Jaeger, ex-Goodman drummer; Spud Murphy, trombone and Lynn Vank, trumpet, both ex-Barrett men; Ralph Tressel, ex-Tommy Dorsey bassist; and Billy Vitale, alto sax and arranger for National Broadcasting System. Former members have been Artie Baker, ex-Shaw trumpet; Teddy Nash, tenor sax; with Les Brown's Rex Stewart, former Ellington trumpet star; Johnny De Hart, Herman's recent trumpet star and arranger; and Francis Falmer, bassist now with Chauncy Ventura. Brick has spoken to both Dave Matthews (Charlie Barnett) and Chubby Jackson, ex-Herman bassist, and both are planning to rehearse with the band when time permits. Matthews, no mean arranger himself, will do arrangements for the band and act as sixth sax man, doubling on soprano and tenor sax.

Fleagle has written for many "A Slight Case of the Shakes," "Same Old Sheaves," "Pastiche," "The Last Four among others were recorded for H.R.S. label and recorded for Victor Records. Chick Webb, Teddy Hill, and Willie Bryant. He also played guitar on the "Low Key" records, with Nat Gonella on Parlophone Records, and has played and arranged for numerous recording dates with such stars as Rex Stewart, Jack Teneard, and Dave Tough. His busy schedule also includes numerous "commercial" jobs as guitarist and arranger. He is justly proud of his collection of jazz records which includes some 5,000 choice items.

Two years ago Fleagle started his present rehearsal band as a means of expression—free from "commercial" restrictions—for himself and a group of other musicians. Outside of a few rare air shots, the band has often rehearsed weekly to the great glee of musicians and spectators alike. Arrangements are almost entirely Fleagle compositions, such as "Sam-Pan," "The Little Goose,"

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